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# PALESTINE DAYS AND NIGHTS



# PALESTINE DAYS AND NIGHTS

Sketches of the Campaign in the  
Holy Land

BY  
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## Dedicated

### TO "D" COMPANY

More than four years, my friends, we spent together,  
In India, Egypt, and in Palestine,  
In peace and war, in fair and stormy weather,  
Guarding the Fort at Delhi—and the Line.  
Once on a time we were "The Viceroy's Own,"  
But latterly that name was quite unknown.

It is of "latterly" that now I write,  
Recalling to your memories again  
Those eighteen months, beginning with the night  
We left Kantara by the cattle train.  
I can still hear your laughter and your cheers.  
Just eighteen months! It seemed like eighteen years.

Do you remember Gaza in the trees?  
The nightly "hates"? And (what we then thought  
viler)  
The septic sores, the misbegotten fleas,  
Stronger than Samson, cunning as Delilah?  
If you've forgotten them, at least you will  
Remember our "first night" on Outpost Hill.

Then the Turks broke, and you marched to the north,  
And there was fighting nearly all the way  
From Fryer's Hill from which you started forth,  
And so across the Plain to Mesmyeh,  
Enab, El Jib, great names for Westshiremen  
(I'm sorry that I was not with you then).

And those long months among the hills in spring,  
Do you remember them?—and Easter Week,  
The May we spent at Rafat following  
Those tragic April games of hide-and-seek?  
Then the hot months we sat the summer through.  
Sometimes I wonder if it all was true.

Or how we spent that last unending night,  
Watching the moon move slowly through the sky,  
Till just before the coming of the light

We passed through tumult to our victory.  
And it was morning over all the Plain,  
Darkness was gone and Peace had come again.

And now, my friends, we part and go our ways,

Yet it is possible that we shall learn  
To think regretfully of those dead days  
Which (how we hated them !) can ne'er return,  
Of that lost comradeship we held to then  
And which is hard to find with other men.

So when our Northern skies are grey and cold,  
And rain is beating on the window-pane,  
When we, who once were young, grow sad and old,  
We shall remember all those things again,  
All we have seen and all that we have done  
In that far land of mountain and of sun.

Then we shall think, perhaps, of those rough heights,  
Soft with the sun or sleeping in moonshine,  
Scent of wild thyme, and far-off flickering lights  
Among the wadis just behind the line,  
The little villages like distant towers,  
And in the spring the splendour of the flowers.

Although, " D " Company, we say good-bye,  
There are some things which I shall not forget :  
The years we spent together, you and I,  
Your cheerful friendship since the day we met,  
Patience and loyalty beyond recall,  
For these and more I want to thank you all.

## INTRODUCTION

THE accompanying sketches lay no claim to form a connected account either of the doings of the regiment with which I served in Palestine, or of the operations in which it took part.

They were written at odd times—and in some odd places. Some were written in that modern version of the mediæval “Little-Ease,” the “bivvy,” others in bed in hospital, others again in the garden of that excellent institution, No. 10 Convalescent Home, Ibrahimieh.

My regiment went out to India in the early days of the War, and after nearly three years of garrison duty, was sent to Egypt just in time to take part in the final operations before Gaza.

After two months of route marching and mountain warfare we settled down for the spring and summer in the hills which are grouped under the name of Mount Ephraim. The settling down involved a good deal of desultory fighting, but once the lines were set and the sangars built there was very little excitement beyond nightly patrols and periodical bombardments. Our war, in fact, as I have indicated

in one of the sketches, became a long round of monotony, punctuated by moments of painful excitement. When we were bored we yearned for the excitement, and when we got the excitement we looked back wistfully to the nice quiet days of monotony.

Finally, of course, we were in at the death on September 19. The Turkish army disappeared as at the wave of a magician's wand, and after much marching and counter-marching we took the train back to Kantara, at which benighted spot all things in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force began, and most ended.

J. G. L.

I, PARK TERRACE,  
NOTTINGHAM.

1920.

# PALESTINE DAYS AND NIGHTS

## I

### Gaza—Before and After

PICTURE to yourself a little Turkish town, a cluster of white, sun-washed, flat-roofed houses flanked by the mud hovels of the poorer quarter. All around are pleasant orchards of orange and lemon and olive trees, a grateful but tantalizing sight for eyes that are weary with the sand of the desert. On the west, a great stretch of dunes separates the town from the sea ; on the east, a girdle of cactus-crowned hills shields it from the wilderness. Such was Gaza as we first saw it ; such too it must have been when Napoleon swept through it on his Syrian adventure ; so too it must have looked to the Crusaders when they made of it an outpost of Christendom ; so, or nearly so, it must have been in the time of Christ.

It is a peaceful scene, the sun glinting on the white houses, the shady orchards, and in the offing, a belt of deepest blue, the Mediterranean.

But take your field-glasses and look a little more closely. If your glasses are good you will see a great deal : that the minarets of the big Mosque are broken and battered, that there is scarcely a house but shows signs of very rough usage, with fallen roof and shattered and jagged walls, while on the right the mud quarter looks like an Indian village which has been submerged in the floods of the Monsoon. Doubtless, if your glasses were even stronger, you would see more : that the trees of the pleasant orchards were torn and tattered as though by the passage of a hurricane, and that the ground was pitted with great holes, as a man's face is scarred with the smallpox. For Gaza, the town of many sieges, is again the object of contending armies, and somewhere in those two miles which separate you from it, coiling round it like a hidden snake, are the trenches of the British army of investment.

We were in a small redoubt, nearly a mile from the firing-line ; from it we obtained an excellent view of the whole position, from Samson Ridge, among the dunes on the left, to the crest of Ali Muntar on the right. In the bright clear atmosphere distance was minimized and objects two or three miles away appeared to us distinct and close at hand.

The view was as uninterrupted as it was excellent ; no sniper ever molested us in our little redoubt, and it was only at rare intervals that the Turk thought it worth while to throw a shell in our

neighbourhood and send us for a space into our dugouts.

We, it may be added, are " D " Company of the 4th Battalion, Westshire Regiment, lately arrived at the scene of operations, as keen as mustard and as green as peas. Consequently we take our redoubt very seriously. The Company Commander spends hours of toil over abortive defensive schemes, to be quite certainly consigned by his successor to the rubbish sand-bag; the second-in-command disappears mysteriously with a map and compass, or sits in his dugout with a protractor and an air of preoccupied importance. At night-time we man our trenches with conscientious zeal and talk in hoarse whispers, and during the day we dig superfluous works with all the refreshing vigour of the newcomer.

We have our trials, however. One fine night there came from the rear a puffing and roaring, and before we rightly realized what had happened, an anti-aircraft gun and its crew had waddled into our privacy and subsided heavily into the little quarry behind our trenches.

Archies are unpleasant neighbours who make a great deal of noise for a very small return, and are apt to attract hostile fire. Consequently we gave them a tepid welcome, and only warmed into a mild enthusiasm when we discovered that an " Archie " lorry carries other things besides its gun—such as an abundance of tinned luxuries for the use of officers.

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So we took toll of them in kind and watched with a certain amount of pity their cheerful but unsuccessful efforts to bring down the Bosche aeroplanes which flew overhead. Apart from the moderate excitement aroused by these excursions the days passed very quietly ; the principal enemy we encountered was the Palestine flea, a pertinacious beast who attacked in force every night, and our principal anxiety hung round the eternal question as to whether there would be bacon or bully for breakfast.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some days after we had got our first view of the Promised Land, "D" Company were moved into the front-line trenches.

Here, indeed, more circumspection was necessary, for the Turk was established in trenches only about five hundred yards away.

Hence in the daytime, to be seen he must be peered at through a periscope, and only viewed with the naked eye during that half-hour of waning light which follows "Stand to."

Just in front of us was Outpost Hill, a strong point in the Turkish line, round which the issue turned in the second battle of Gaza. Its steep slope was crowned with the inevitable fringe of barbed wire, while near the top lay, like some sleeping monster from an African river, the battered remains of a stranded Tank.

Between us ran a deep gully, the favourite hunting-ground of our patrols. At first it was full of minor

thrills, dark corners to be explored with the bayonet, remnants of old equipment, and, best of all, a real dead Turk. This particular Turk became an old but unpleasant friend, finally to be passed by with quickened step and averted nose. Penton gully was a great resource for our Intelligence Officer. When all else failed, it was always possible to order out an unfortunate subaltern and ten men to spend the best hours of the night in its grisly purlieus and return with a report which was mostly negatives, but which generally did not fail to mention the progress of the dead Turk.

Apart from patrols, interest in life was sustained by the daily and nightly hate with which the Turks favoured us.

This, of course, took the form of an artillery bombardment, kept up with creditable violence for half an hour or so, to stop as suddenly as it had begun. By these it was borne in on us, with a certain surprise, how comparatively ineffective artillery fire can be when you are in the shelter of a deep trench or dugout. At first when the shells came over, when the air was drumming with the noise of their detonation, and little showers of earth came pattering down, it seemed impossible that we could avoid heavy casualties—indeed, so often did it happen that a shell would fall and burst in a firebay which was for the moment unoccupied, or that a "dud" would fall in a trench which was full of men, that it was hard to avoid the impression that we

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must be under the special protection of that Providence which looks after the British Army in general, and its greener units in particular.

It must be remembered that this was our first spell in the front line.

Casualties, however, came; the first casualties which "D" Company had had, and the poor shell-torn bodies carried with reverent care to the Aid post in rear gave us our first glimpse of the more horrible side of modern war, and reminded us that it was something more than a wearisome game which we were playing.

On the whole, we did not grudge the Turk his periodical "hate." All the time he was getting so much more than he was giving. From hour to hour the sullen booming of our guns broke on our ears with monotonous iteration; in those last days before the fall of Gaza it seemed that he could have no respite, no rest from the ceaseless shelling which turned his trenches into a shambles, demoralized their wretched defenders and played havoc with his communications in rear.

One morning a deserter came in. All night he had lain in the gully and at dawn he had crept up to our wire and given himself up to our listening-post. Poor devil! His uniform was worn and ragged, and of equipment he had nothing but a gas-helmet. When we gave him some Army biscuit, he wolfed it down as if it were the greatest of delicacies, and all the time looked about him with frightened, hunted eyes, as

if he could hardly believe that we were not going to kill him on the spot.

For some weeks all the talk had been of the coming offensive by which Gaza was to be taken and the Turkish army driven in disorder from Beersheba unto Dan. Almost as many dates were given for its commencement as there are days in the month, and the only point on which all were agreed, from the junior Staff Officer, with his air of secrecy and omniscience, to Private Taylor of "D" Company, was that the offensive would take place in the near future. There was an air of excitement and anticipation abroad; leaflets on offensive action were showered upon us; practice attacks were held, and equipment was revised and overhauled.

We had been about a week in our front line trenches when the first definite news arrived. There had been a movement on the right, and our troops, pushing their way through waterless country, had surprised and captured Beersheba. The next move, we were told, would come from the left, from that part of our line which thrust itself like a wedge between Gaza and the sea: then it would be our turn, and not unnaturally it was our turn which interested us most.

Space forbids description of the various transformations which our plans underwent before reaching maturity, the prolonged pow-wows, the excitement of the Little Colonel, the imperturbability of the Adjutant, the harassed appearance of the Company Commanders.

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Let us hasten on to the final day, or rather night, when at zero hour the Westshires were timed to make their attack on Outpost Hill. For some days preceding this date the intensity of the bombardment in which the Turkish lines were enveloped had been increased. By daylight, almost without ceasing, the shells of field gun and "heavy" hissed over our heads and fell with a roar on the enemy's trenches, spouting columns of smoke and sand and débris into the air, while by night the clean pounding of naval guns away to our left showed that our monitors had crept inshore and were joining in the chorus.

More than once, in the distance, the bombardment had risen to the roar of a barrage, when we knew that our infantry were swarming over the sand of the dunes on the west of the town. Later we heard that they had successfully captured the Turkish positions opposite to them.

The fruit was indeed ripening on the tree and hung, heavy and drooping, ready to fall into our hands. But before this could happen Outpost Hill must be taken, and taken in a night attack by the Westshires.

Let us visit White's Wadi, the point of assembly for "D" Company, late on the appointed evening.

In the darkness runners are passing up and down with last messages to the platoon commanders; men are hitching on their kit a good quarter of an hour before they need to do so; the Company

Commander is taking a last look at the map by the light of a candle, and the Quartermaster-Sergeant is going his rounds with a pannikin of rum. Over all there hangs an air of nervous expectancy.

It was the regiment's début. What would we find on the other side of that line of wire which had become so familiar to us? How many of us would answer to our names at daybreak? Would the Regiment make good its reputation? And mingled with these were other speculations as futile: Was such-and-such an arrangement thoroughly understood? Would the Turks have guessed that we were coming? Should we all find our way to the rendezvous? These and a hundred other anxious doubts filled our last moments. Let him who has made a night attack and not known them throw the first stone.

At last we were ready to move off. At least, we were not, for where were Sergeant Stokes and his platoon? A frantic, unavailing search followed. "Never mind. We can't wait now," said the Company Commander. "We must just hope to pick them up later on." So "D" Company marched off in single file down a mile-long communication trench leading to the front.

The place of assembly for the battalion was our old friend, the gully of the patrols and the dead Turk. Great gaps had been cut in our wire in front of it; through these we were to pass, and having arrived in the gully, were to sort ourselves into our respective

lines and await the barrage which was to cover our advance.

Of our journey to the gully little need be said. There were the usual hitches and checks. Officers feverishly consulted their watches and swore that we should be late ; sulphurous messages arrived from the rear inquiring what in Heaven's name was holding up the column in front. Sergeant Stokes and his missing men put in a belated appearance ; and the Adjutant stalked about the fire trenches, regulating the traffic.

At last our turn came, and we climbed over the parapet and hurried through the wire into the gully. Here the scene resembled a busy night at a big railway junction. The gully was packed with men detached from their companies, stray platoons which had got out of place, officers who had lost their commands and commands which had lost their officers. Conversation, which had to be conducted in husky whispers, became distinctly hectic, and several non-commissioned officers with a reputation for intelligence appeared, probably quite incorrectly, to have been struck with a sudden and ill-timed imbecility.

Impossible that the Turk could fail to detect all the bustle and scurry, the clank of some unwary man's equipment, the passage of so many hundred pairs of boots. Impossible too that order should ever be evolved out of so hopeless a chaos.

Yet the apparently impossible happened. No

noise of shelling came to break the stillness of the night, and slowly and painfully the long lines sorted themselves out, moved from the gully and lay down in the open of No Man's Land. We were ready.

The night seemed unnaturally quiet ; our own artillery was silent, and from the Turkish trenches there came no sound save the occasional crack of a sniper's rifle.

Then the barrage began, breaking on the night in a storm of sound.

The air was suddenly filled with the hissing and roaring of shells ; crash followed crash with such rapidity that each was lost in the volume of noise ; the hill itself was lit with an unearthly glare, then wrapped in thick clouds of smoke. To our left came the separate din of the machine-gun barrage, beating on the Turkish lines like a giant hailstorm.

To us that ghastly unnatural picture of Outpost Hill will remain a vivid memory, a vision of the lowest circle of the Inferno.

Then we went forward. . . .

Never had five hundred yards seemed so long a distance. To us it appeared as if we had walked at least a mile before we began to stumble over torn wire and battered trenches and knew that we had reached the Turkish line. The barrage had lifted and was now seething and roaring a hundred yards ahead.

Our difficulties were only beginning at this point. We had entered the Turkish position, but we had

now to find our objective, a long curling trench fully half a mile on. What had appeared perfectly simple on a trench map, studied in the seclusion of a dugout became a hopeless puzzle in the darkness and disorder of the night. Moreover to make confusion worse confounded, the men of the Cidershires on our right, having similarly occupied Middlesex Hill, came swarming into our midst.

Still we went on, tripping over fragments of wire, stumbling over the remains of what had once been trenches, pushing blindly forward in what we fondly hoped was the right direction.

How we finally reached our trench I am unable to say, but reach it we did, without encountering anything more offensive than a few dead Turks. Having safely arrived and established connection with our front and flanks, we all lay down and got some sleep. It had indeed been a bloodless victory, for the Turk had fled like a thief in the night, and left us in almost undisturbed possession of one of his most cherished positions.

Daybreak found "D" Company weary but enthusiastic. The one thought in every one's mind was whether we should be allowed to push on and capture Gaza. Nor were orders slow in coming. The Adjutant arrived with the sun and told us that we were to advance nearly a mile and occupy a position on the left of our new front line.

So we moved forward past empty trenches and deserted dugouts, littered with odd pieces of value-

less property which the Turk in his haste had left behind him. As he went we could appreciate the fact that we had left the wilderness and had entered the boundaries of the Promised Land. Trailing vines hung over our new trenches and fig trees threw a grateful shade over the doorways of the dugouts, while in front of us orchards of fruit trees stretched for nearly a mile up to the walls of Gaza.

It was a pleasant and peaceful spot and "D" Company proceeded in a leisurely way to make itself thoroughly comfortable. Mess tins were unfastened and in a short time fires were lit, and brews of tea were being made and drunk.

So we breakfasted at our ease, and there was little on that sunny morning to remind us of war save the faint odour of rotting pineapple—which told us of the insanitary habit of the Turk of burying his dead in the parapet of his trenches—and the swarms of sluggish carrion flies which hung pestilently round our food, and showed that our enemy, if a good fighter, was a man of unhygienic habits.

"Whizz—bang!" Somewhere from our right rear a shell dropped into our midst.

"Stretcher-bearer! Pass the word for the stretcher-bearers!"

The cry with which we were become unhappily familiar rang out, and presently an unfortunate man was carried away to the Aid post.

So with a curse on the untimely activity of the

Turk, we collected our kit, and took cover in the unpreposesssing dugouts near by.

After that the peace of the morning continued to be broken by that one ill-conditioned gun, which, from an altogether impossible position in our rear, continued to plant shells in our trenches.

We were not, however, to suffer long from its attentions, for presently the objurgations of Corporal Rowse showed that the field-telephone had begun to be active, and was behaving after the way of telephones all the world over. Eventually a long order from Battalion Headquarters was reeled out, not without a sharp exchange of amenities between Corporal Rowse and a dictatorial person, identity unknown, at the other end of the wire. The gist of the message was that we were to move at once and join the rest of the battalion in occupying a position on Fryer's Hill, some five miles away, and to the north-east of Gaza.

A few minutes of preparation saw "D" Company on its travels again, winding down a long trench in the direction of the town. Emerging from this we began a very pleasant march in artillery formation through the orchards which lay round Gaza, skirting great hedges of cactus and prickly pear, and getting occasional glimpses of white houses on our left.

As we marched, other units began to appear to right and left and behind us, all making in the same direction by platoons and companies ; close by that dread stronghold, Ali Muntar, the little Colonel

darted across our path, followed by the Headquarters runners, faint but pursuing. Evidently the battalion was in process of reassembly.

No one quite seemed to know what we were going to do, whether Fryer's Hill was held by the enemy, or whether we should be allowed to occupy it without a struggle.

We were not left long in doubt, for at length there was a check, word came back that we had reached our destination, that the Turks were resisting, and that we were to advance in attack formation.

Our starting point was a road running across the hill, and from this, "D" Company, who were in support, shook out into the required order, and began to advance.

Scarcely, however, had we started before from our right flank the shelling began. Evidently the Turk had marked down for future action the piece of ground which we were crossing, as he proceeded with objectionable accuracy to plaster it with high-explosive shells.

Moreover, at that moment our advance was held up from the front, and the rattle of Lewis gun and rifle told us that the leading companies were engaged. So there was nothing for it but to lie down in the open and await developments—and Turkish shells. The latter certainly were forthcoming, and began to drop unpleasantly close to our little groups. There is nothing more demoralizing than to be set down in the open and pelted with high explosive.

You have a peculiar feeling of nakedness of which the shells display a most improper callousness. Not only do they come, but they give the fullest warning of their coming. "I'm coming, I'm coming!" you can hear them shriek as they pass through the air, and there is an uncomfortable interval of a couple of seconds before they end your suspense by landing with a nerve-shattering crash (we hope) some fifty yards away.

After a few minutes we began to have casualties, and presently the order came to retire to a more covered spot behind some cactus hedges in rear. There we sat down to wait, and in a short time the news arrived that the forward position had been made good, and that we could settle down for the rest of the day where we were. The Turkish battery on our flank, however, had a word to say in the matter of settling down, and continued to shell us with great industry for the greater part of the afternoon. Nor were his efforts entirely without effect, as was shown by the thin but steady stream of wounded men passing to our Aid post in rear. The Medical Officer and the Padre hurried to and fro, doing all that they could to make them more comfortable, no easy task, as we had outmarched our medical stores as well as the rest of our transport. The remainder of us crouched in the lee of a cactus hedge, and scratched up some sort of cover with our little entrenching tools. On the whole, perhaps, we were relying in an unreasoning way on our cactus hedge

for protection. It is curious how the flimsiest of cover gives a man confidence under shell-fire ; there are a great many men who, if required to advance under a hail of shrapnel, would feel comparatively happy if allowed the use of an umbrella. This is a curious fact, to the truth of which others will testify. So it was that we sat with a feeling of security behind a hedge which had the protective capacity of brown paper, and began to attend to our other wants.

Rest we had got, food we had brought, but our principal need, water, remained a need. We had filled our bottles before the night attack and had spent the next day marching and fighting under a hot sun. It was now evening and there was not enough water in the Company to drown a mouse in ; nor was there any immediate prospect of obtaining any more. No one who has not served in an Eastern country will appreciate how enormously our army in Palestine has been handicapped by the shortage of water ; and no one who has not experienced it will appreciate the peculiar hardship of a great thirst which there is no means of quenching, not an English summer-afternoon thirst, but the raging Oriental variety which dries up the pores of the throat and takes a couple of days of steady drinking to satisfy. Meanwhile there are marches to be made, enemies to be met, work to be done, and no thirst, however great, must be allowed to interfere with these duties.

Just before dusk fresh orders arrived. "D" Company was to occupy a line of trenches, on our doubtful right flank, facing the offensive Turkish batteries. We moved in without loss of time and took stock of our surroundings. To our front, for several miles, stretched the undulating desert, covered with a dry, coarse grass which in the uncertain light gave it an illusory resemblance to English down-land or the green waste of Salisbury Plain. About three miles away we could plainly see the Turkish gun positions. The guns were now silent and a thin curl of blue smoke showed that the men were having their evening meal. Well! They had had their fun; soon it would be their task to try and escape the comprehensive grip of General Allenby's pincers.

As soon as the duties were posted, the remainder of us lay down in our trenches to sleep the sleep of the honestly tired. For had we not taken our share that day in the fall of Gaza? Neither thirst nor weariness could repress a feeling of elation at the sense of something tangible accomplished. We felt that if not the advanced guard we were at least well to the fore in General Allenby's personally conducted tour of the Holy Land.

\* \* \* \*

Accompany the writer of these lines as he is driven in an Ambulance car through the outskirts of Gaza. Surely it is a city of the dead. The streets are silent, the houses stand ruined and empty, and over all hangs the silence of desertion. It is said that

a few Turks still linger in the cellars, waiting until hunger shall drive them into the open. But the population has fled, to return, perhaps, when the busy activities of the Egyptian Labour Corps shall have restored the town to something of its ancient order. Meanwhile it is a deserted city. The ground has been churned up by shell-fire and even the roads are almost impassable in places from the great pits which have been torn up in the fairway.

Strewn about are all the *débris* of modern war : unexploded shells of every sort and size, great pieces of shell case, packets of small-arm ammunition, broken, discarded water-bottles, and odds and ends of equipment.

Soon, we know, the place will be transformed : litter will be cleared away, craters will be filled in, houses will be repaired, and Gaza will be another monument to the tidiest army that ever went campaigning in the East.

Hear in conclusion a Turkish opinion on all these events, gathered and brought to the present writer from the cactus bush on which it had been conspicuously hung :

“ Ah, England ! You who is accounted the most civilized nation on this world and the helper of the weak nation ! Excuse me to announce that you are the most savage nation in this world. What is the wrong which we have done it ? Is it because we are defending our country honorarily ? You are bombarding savagely day and night—shame for a

nation who counts herself civilized! But let me tell you and make you understand well that you are not going to get any benefit from this savage expedition, because we know how to defend our beloved country."

## II

### Jerusalem Delivered <sup>1</sup>

THE first intimation of the good news came at dinner-time and was conveyed by Hubert, or rather by his head which appeared suddenly between the laced flaps of the doorway of the tent.

"We've got our leave," he said. "Two days. We start to-morrow, have the whole of Monday and Tuesday at Jerusalem, and come back on Wednesday."

There were groans of envy from the others in the Company Mess, and I jumped up to begin my preparations. For he who goes to Jerusalem on leave does well to start early in the morning. Accordingly, sunrise on Sunday saw us starting upon our journey, Hubert and myself, our two batmen and a mule which carried our packs.

Travelling in Palestine is something of an adven-

<sup>1</sup> The visit here recorded was paid, and the sketch itself was written in February, 1918, less than two months after the city had been captured from the Turks. Under the excellent military government set up by General Allenby many and surprising changes for the better have been made.

ture. You never quite know how you are going to make your journey or when you are going to reach your destination. In our case there were three different modes of travel from which to make our choice. The first was walking, which, as the distance was twenty-five miles, we were determined to avoid ; the second was the train which arrived and departed at its own sweet will ; the third was the motor-lorry, a form of conveyance with all the vices and few of the virtues of the London Omnibus Company. We had serious thoughts of the train, were at one time nearly reduced to walking, and finally succeeded in picking up a friendly lorry.

This, however, did not occur until we had sat by the roadside for a couple of hours waiting until our own particular lorry should turn up ; for like the London bus again, the lorry goes anywhere but where you want to go.

However, our patience was rewarded at length, and ten o'clock saw us bumping along the Jaffa-Jerusalem road in a fair way to make our destination before sundown. " Bumping " is perhaps a mild way of describing our journey on that lorry. The memory of it is still with us in the form of aches and pains, and when these are gone will still remain a memory.

If only the Turk fought his battles as badly as he makes his roads, we should have been in Constantinople long ago.

Nor was our progress exactly accelerated by the

traffic. Now it would be another convoy of lorries coming from the opposite direction, enveloped in a cloud of dust and petrol fumes, now a light Ford car which darted from hole to heap and from heap to rut with startling agility ; now it would be a long line of camels patiently plodding on its laden way to some ration dump ; and now it would be a patriarchal Jew on a white donkey, who would ride forth out of the pages of the Old Testament and scuttle across our path on some business of his own.

The road ran between rich fields and fertile crops, here an olive orchard and there a vineyard, and every now and then a squat village of flat-roofed houses, perched on a piece of rising ground. On either side were little marshy wadis, their banks fringed with thick grass and glowing with scarlet anemones, and in the distance we could see the grey, rugged slopes of the Judean Hills.

Presently we passed Latrun, which tradition assigns as the birthplace of Dismas, the Penitent Thief, and shortly afterwards we began climbing into a country which Dismas must have found ideal for the practice of his trade. Gone were the crops, the vineyards and the orchards. We had entered a land of grey rocks and crags, as barren as the hills of Southern Spain and as wild as a Highland glen. It might well have been the home of robbers and outlaws ; the Maccabees must have found in it a friendly shelter, and for the biblical robber, the marauding sheikh and the nineteenth-century brigand

it must have been an excellent hunting-ground.

Our road twisted and turned among the hills, passing through country where every village was sited like a fortress and every convent was walled like a castle—past Kuryet-el-Enab, which was stormed by our division during the advance, and which may have been the Kirjath Jearim of the Old Testament ; past the rock tombs of Saba, a small village which some identify as the birthplace of Judas Maccabaeus. On a distant height we could see Nebi Samwil, the tomb of the prophet Samuel, a Mohammedan holy place shattered ruthlessly by Turkish artillery and finally captured by us at no small price.

Presently the red roofs of the Jewish Orphanage and Asylum brought us back into the twentieth century, and a few minutes after sighting them we had entered the suburbs of Jerusalem.

No one can see Jerusalem for the first time as we saw it without a feeling of disappointment. It resembled an English provincial town rather than a Holy City. There were masses of grey and white houses with red-tiled roofs, here and there a very modern church tower, and a few buildings which might have been factories or barracks, but were in fact Hospices. The real Jerusalem we saw the next day from the Mount of Olives, but from the western side the suburbs, which are as ugly as only suburbs can be, dominate and conceal the city.

Another ten minutes found us at our hotel, tired,

dusty and a good deal buffeted by the inequalities of the road.

The war has made Jerusalem a place of many contrasts. It was only necessary to stand on the balcony of our hotel and watch the passers-by to realize this truth.

First there would come a line of limbers driven by big Australians ; then a handful of lean, dignified Bedouins would stride by in their picturesque dress ; a band of Tommies on leave and keenly hunting for souvenirs would follow them ; a stream of Jews would flow by, their pale faces and long hair appearing out of black Astrakhan caps, their long coats and their air of Europeans badly disguised as Asiatics lending them a quaint appearance. Two or three Greek priests in their black habits and chimney-pot hats would come next, closely followed by a couple of *poilus* in the French sky-blue uniform. Latin nuns, camel-drivers, veiled women, tarbooshed Syrians, Sikh and Mohammedan sepoyes, military policemen, Staff officers, Greeks and Armenians, ladies quite fashionably dressed by the standards of 1910, European clerks in cheap tweeds and bowler hats : the whole was an extraordinary jumble of East and West, war and peace, religion and commerce.

Inside the hotel the contrast is maintained. The walls are still decorated with German notices and maps ; to get a hot bath is a matter of some difficulty, just as it was before the war in a second-rate German hotel. You enter the room labelled " Bad," per-

suade a Hebrew chamber-maid to light a cylindrical contrivance of German manufacture, and in the course of half an hour or so, if you are lucky, you bathe in three inches of tepid water.

The war chiefly asserts itself in the matter of food. Jerusalem, as our army found it, was on the verge of starvation. The Turks had taken what they could find and eaten what they had taken, with unfortunate results for the civil population. There was, in fact, a shortage, not a temporary shortage of food queues and bread tickets, but a real famine with flour and rice at starvation prices. Some trade there had been, but as it usually took the form of giving food and silver money in return for a rapidly depreciating Turkish banknote, there had been little competition.

As a result of these happenings, in order to obtain a decent meal it is necessary for the officer to draw his own ration. We deposited our loaves of bread in the manager's office in much the same way as in peaceful days a lady deposited her jewellery.

Subsequently, we ate a well-cooked meal served by Jewish and Syrian waiters, who, a few short weeks ago, were attending in the same place to the wants of German officers. Once when the waiter had given us more than our fair share of neglect I tried the effect of calling "Kellner!" and the unhappy man leapt as if he had been shot and hurried to our table.

In the course of the meal the electric light sud-

denly gave out and we all hurriedly grabbed our loaves of bread.

One more view of Jerusalem at war. Listen to a Staff officer dispensing information to some new arrivals.

"The Field Cashier? You'll find him on the Mount of Olives. Yes, close to the German Hospice, the ugly building on the top. Your batmen? They can get a meal at the Y.M.C.A. canteen, opposite the Russian Barracks. No, they'll have to live at the Divisional Rest Camp just beyond Mount Zion. The signal office at the corner of the Jericho road will tell them the way. To get back to your hotel? Well, the best thing you can do is to get the Sergeant of the Military Police just outside the Damascus Gate to direct you. Good-bye."

And so night fell on this city of surprises, where Field Cashiers did their business on the Mount of Olives, and British Military Police patrolled the Damascus Gate, and a Y.M.C.A. canteen diverted the attention of Russian pilgrims.

Jerusalem has been delivered from the Turk; who shall deliver it from the prosaic matter-of-factness of the British Army?

\* \* \* \* \*

Early the next morning we left our hotel. Both Hubert and I are indifferent sightseers, and share a dislike for being preached at and hustled by guides. After about two hours of the game our energy begins to flag and a need for refreshment makes itself felt,

Lunch is hailed with undisguised relief and is followed by a strong disinclination to resume operations. However, for the sake of our future peace of mind we were determined not to neglect our opportunities, and realizing that in the strength of mind and untiring zeal of our guide would lie our one hope of salvation, we chose one with some care and committed ourselves without reservation to his charge. He was a Greek Arab—Arab by race and Greek by religious persuasion—and showed a relentless energy and a surprising knowledge of the English tongue. Thus escorted, we started off from the Jaffa Gate of the city.

It is a curious fact that Jerusalem, which lodges so many different races, should yet be so characteristically Eastern a city. Neither Cairo nor Delhi are so untouched by the hand of the West ; in neither has that essentially Western commodity, Time, passed by so firmly on the other side. The steep and narrow lanes, with their slippery flags and their raised steps, must have risen from the ruins of the Jerusalem which the soldiers of Titus destroyed. All the sounds and scents of the Bazaar are there, and modern drainage is emphatically not there.

On either side are the booths of the merchants, with their stacks of cauliflowers and Jaffa oranges, their trays of sticky food and bottles of nauseating liquor, their gaudy cloths and cheap German trinkets.

Occasionally the lane runs under an arcade or burrows its way under a house, and here it is darker,

more noisome and more crowded than before. Even in the open the houses lean towards each other as if striving to exclude the narrow strip of light which is still visible, and up and down passes a busy, jostling crowd of Jews and Greeks, Arabs and Syrians, and here and there an Orthodox priest. Above the hubbub and chatter of the crowd rise the cries of the hawkers, pressing their unsavoury wares upon the passer-by.

"Now much business," remarked our guide. "When Turk here he come in and take everything—never pay. Now we very glad—English always pay."

At first sight that may seem high commendation, but sometimes one is inclined to wonder whether the paradoxical East means it as such.

The German or the Turk would walk boldly into a shop, take what he wanted, and stride away leaving the wretched owner cringing with gratitude because he was still sound in life and limb. The British soldier comes along, looking probably for some humble souvenir to send to his home, is asked four times and pays twice the value of the article, and departs followed by the grumbling of the shopkeeper. It is all perhaps another illustration of the insight of the German officer who is reputed to have said, "You will always be fools and we shall never be gentlemen."

Going out of the city by St. Stephen's Gate and passing the spot under the walls where the martyr

was stoned to death, we crossed the Valley of Kidron and came to the Garden of Gethsemane.

To the ordinary Anglican, who is neither a pilgrim nor an iconoclast, there is something repugnant about the way in which the Holy Places have been treated by their guardians.

No sooner has one of the historical spots been identified than it is at once obliterated. In other words, its original character is completely obscured by a costly superstructure of lamps and images, pious inscriptions and rich hangings; a chapel (usually in the worst architectural style) is raised over it, and finally it loses all its historical associations and becomes merely another place of worship. How far more impressive we should find the Holy Sepulchre itself if we could see it still as the rough rock tomb to which on the first day of the week came Mary Magdalene early!

With what infinitely deeper feeling we would view Calvary, if it were still the brown and barren hillside on which our Lord was crucified! To see these places through a mist of incense, by the light of tapers and golden lamps, is to see nothing but the marble and the silver, the mosaics and the images, the rich coverings and gilded ornaments which profusely overlay them. To many this treatment must seem not reverence but sacrilege, acts not of piety but of desecration. Apart from the artistic demerits of most of the monuments which the Christian Churches have raised in Jerusalem, one

thing has been utterly destroyed, the splendid simplicity of the Bible story.

Gethsemane has suffered with the other Holy Places. There remain seven gnarled and twisted olive trees of great age reputed to have been in the Garden when Christ prayed there ; but round them is a paling of unnecessary height and hideousness, while the piety of the guardians has planted the interior with an array of symmetrical flower-beds, and erected along the walls a set of the Stations of the Cross. Even so, I suppose that one should feel grateful that the olive trees have not been torn asunder by pilgrims or buried under gilded domes at the expense of some pious potentate.

From Gethsemane we climbed up the Mount of Olives, past the Rock of the Agony, and the spot where Jesus wept over the city, to the Chapel of the Ascension.

From here we could see Jerusalem as it should be remembered : a city of domes and spires set among olive-crowned hills. Beneath the churches and the Mosques lay the flat roofs of the houses, and encircling them ran the great wall of the city.

As it lay there in the sun it approached far more nearly the Holy City of one's imagination, the city of David and Solomon and the Maccabees, the city which first welcomed and then rejected the Messiah, which suffered the terrible vengeance of Rome, and which rose again to be the battle-ground of Crusader and Moslem.

Behind it stretched the Judean Hills in swelling waves of grey and green and purple, and beyond them lay Jaffa and the sea. Looking eastward we could see the valley of the Jordan and the great barren mountains of Moab on the farther side of the Dead Sea : it was a stark, forbidding country, a wild land of gloom and darkness, stretching away towards the deserts of Arabia. The view from the Mount of Olives is charged with history, and as if to remind us that that history is not yet complete, from the south and east came the booming of guns ; in fact it was even possible to spot the shells as they burst in the debateable land around Jericho and the north shore of the Dead Sea, while on the second day of our visit the majority of the military population of Jerusalem climbed up the Mount of Olives to witness a carefully prepared attack on Jericho. At least they were able to refute a widely circulated rumour to the effect that the attack was to be undertaken by the massed bands of the divisions concerned.

We came back through the city by way of the Mosque of Omar, the noblest building in Jerusalem and, after the Taj Mahal, probably the finest Mohammedan work in the world. It lay there like a great jewel, with its marble and its mosaics, its marvelously harmonious colouring of green and blue. It was indeed worthy of its site, one of the spots most sacred to Islam.

From there we made our way to the Via Dolorosa,

the winding, stony lane up which our Lord toiled beneath the burden of the Cross. Here was the spot where the Cross had been laid on the shoulders of Simon of Cyrene ; at this steep corner our Lord had fallen, and under this archway St. Veronica had received the miraculous imprint upon her cloth. The Via Dolorosa owes the greater part of its impressiveness to the fact that it remains to-day what it was at the time of the great Tragedy, a busy thoroughfare in the heart of a great city.

After lunch we went to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. No Christian can visit it and learn its history without strangely mingled feelings, so closely is reverence combined with its antithesis. At one time Good Friday was habitually the date and the Church itself the scene of a riotous brawl between the partisans of the Roman and Orthodox Churches. Even now the festival is regarded with apprehension by the authorities. The visitor is further surprised to learn that the strife generally centres round a miracle (declared by the Latins to be spurious) which the Greek Patriarch annually supervises on the threshold of the Holy Sepulchre. Apart from the vexed question as to whether the sacred fire proceeds from Heaven or from the Greek Patriarch, there is a standing competition for the possession of the different sites within the church. The prizes are a slightly larger share of some particular shrine or the right to burn an extra candle on some particular altar, and the contest which begins

with diplomatic negotiations at Constantinople is generally settled *vi et armis* inside the Church. And then, to our shame, the Mohammedan authorities intervene and deliver a final verdict.

To add the taint of commercialism to these controversies each sacred place has its guardian who complacently exacts "bakshish" from the pilgrim, as if he were the proprietor of a peepshow.

Incongruous, indeed, is the first sight which confronts the visitor.

Our armies have entered Jerusalem, we have won it back for Christianity, and yet in the doorway of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre sit the Mohammedan guardian and his staff. They take their toll from the visitors and regard doubtless with contemptuous tolerance the respect which they pay to their surroundings, and would without question consider themselves grievously ill-treated were we to turn them out of so lucrative a job.

The next surprise for the visitor will be administered either by Baedeker or by his guide. He will discover that the most minute incidents in the Gospels and in the traditions which have grown around them have had sites allocated to them. He will further learn that the identification of all the Holy Places in the Church was made as late as the fourth century by the Empress Irene, whose methods were those not of scientific research but of inspiration. According to the dictates of this arbitrary lady the exact location of the Holy Places

has been fixed, and to dispute her plenary inspiration is to declare yourself an outcast, at any rate in the eyes of the Greek and Latin Churches and a large number of other Churches of less importance, whose story may be read in the pages of Gibbon, but whose present existence comes as something of a surprise to the ignorant traveller.

The visitor then makes another discovery. On entering the Church he will find, a few yards to his left, the Holy Sepulchre; a few yards to his right and up some steps he will then find Calvary; the two sites are thus literally under the same roof. Those who have pictured a green hill far away without a city wall will be astonished to find nothing but a richly decorated Chapel raised slightly above the level of the Church. Certainly the story in the Gospels leaves a different impression.

The Church itself is not so much a church as a group of chapels, built at different times and in different styles, collected under one roof. On each chapel the generosity of pilgrims has lavished gold and treasure until the original aspect of the spot has become swamped by the gifts of worshippers. The general impression which the Church leaves is that of almost unequalled but quite undirected munificence; there is no plan, no order, nothing of the completeness or of the austere splendour of a Gothic cathedral: it is a monument of individual generosity; each Church, each man almost, has brought his treasure and has laid it on the spot

which has caught most strongly at his emotions. It is, in fact, a multitude of chapels, some so tiny that a man can scarcely enter inside.

I suppose that to the religious population of Jerusalem the strangest thing about the Church on the day that we visited it was the quality of the visitors. Side by side with the pious who kissed the stone on which the Body of our Lord was washed, with the priests who swept past with cross and censer, with the guardians who squabbled for "bakshish" and the men who sold candles and tapers, was a very different crowd. Groups of Australian troopers with jingling spurs passed up and down; two or three bands of soldiers under the care of a Y.M.C.A. guide made a tour of the Holy Places, while as we watched a stream of Indian sepoy went chattering by the Sepulchre to gaze with puzzled wonder at the splendours of the Latin Chapel.

Most curious of all was the detached attitude of the ordinary British soldier. This was Christianity as he had never known it, indeed it scarcely seemed to be Christianity at all. So he passed through the Church gazing stolidly at its wonders, impressed a great deal more by its decorations than by its religious and historical significance. We were accompanied by our batmen, who withheld all comment until we were leaving, when Hubert's man shook his head doubtfully and remarked, "Take a lot of keeping clean, sir."

Of course, we saw many other sights in Jerusalem,

and on the second day we hired a ramshackle conveyance and drove out to Bethlehem. But all the sights which we saw and the places which we visited, are they not, to use the language of the Old Testament, written in the book of Baedeker ?

Three things above all remain to us : the first is the view from the Mount of Olives ; the second is the interior of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre ; the third is not so easy to describe ; it is the Great War which has come even to Jerusalem and which hangs over the city like a rain-cloud from the Judean Hills.

### III

## The Picnic Patrol

IN the winter of 1917-1918 the war in our part of the world had assumed a more tolerable aspect.

The Turk is really a very sympathetic enemy. He revels in that unwritten law of modern warfare, the mutual understanding. If you forbear to shell him he will undertake not to shell you ; if you do not pester him with patrols he will leave your nights undisturbed. Of course, if you become vindictive and spoil his afternoon siesta with an intensive bombardment he will retaliate in kind, but he will always do it in such a way as to intimate that the payment is to account rendered and that in his opinion a mutual abstention from hostile activities is a much better policy for both parties.

In fact he may be *méchant*, but his naughtiness is very much of the kind described by the French naturalist: " quand on l'attaque il se défend."

Gaza had been a most unpleasant experience for him. During the daytime he was pelted by an artillery which developed a superiority over his own

that can only be described as unsporting, while from time to time impudent aeroplanes swooped down and brazenly machine-gunned him in his trenches. At night there was more bombardment, and, most detestable trick of all, monitors would steal up the coast and drop enormous shells on to his ration parties.

Then there were raids, horrible, nerve-shattering affairs. He would wake up to find a Ghurka sharpening his *kukri* in a suggestive way at the entrance to his dugout, or to receive an invitation in broad Scots, supported by half an inch of bayonet in the fleshy part of his body, "to come awa' yonder wi' me." And Scotsmen are so unnecessarily rough.

Altogether the Turk was not sorry when the cavalry and the Londoners swooped down on Beer-sheba and the word went round that a change of scene was to be sought in the north. But his troubles by no means ended at this point. According to his ideas he would withdraw with dignity to a convenient position some thirty miles or so to the north of Gaza, where, after a decent interval, the amenities of trench warfare would be resumed. Unfortunately, despite protestations to the contrary, the English, in the opinion of the Turks, are not always gentlemen in their methods of warfare. On this occasion, at any rate, they showed a most unmannerly desire to speed the parting guest. The dignified withdrawal became a rapid retreat, rearguard actions were daily occurrences, and the Turk was beset with the

supremely uncomfortable feeling that if the British Cavalry had not already got round his flanks it would very shortly do so. How long this harrying process would have continued it is difficult to say, but both parties (rather short of temper by this time) were hurling boulders at each other on the edge of the Judean Hills when the weather interfered with shattering decision.

When the weather in Palestine makes up its mind to intervene the wise man at once abandons any plans which he may have formed and seeks the most water-tight building that he can find. At any rate that is what he will have to do in the end.

The rain specializes in bouts of three days, sometimes doubling the score and making it six, nor during that period is it possible at any moment to be in doubt as to whether it is really raining or not. The wadis, frequently used in happier seasons as high roads, become rushing torrents, and the entire plain is transformed into a morass of liquid mud, almost impassable by man or beast. One of the more pathetic sights of a Palestine winter is a long string of camels, children of the sun and the sand, attempting to cope with conditions of which even in their more intellectual moments (and a camel can be very intellectual) they have never conceived.

As far as we were concerned the war came to an abrupt and unregretted end. The Turk, tired and very bedraggled, retired out of range of our hated artillery and proceeded to billet himself on the

unwilling inhabitants of some convenient village. Divisional Staffs engaged in an unseemly scramble for the possession of the best monasteries, and all ranks of the infantry applied themselves to the insoluble problem of the waterproof "bivouac." In fact, like Caesar, who was both a soldier and a sensible man, we all went into winter quarters.

"Bivouacs" were reinforced with extra sheets, "wangled" from the Quartermaster; one bell tent was issued per Company, and, plentifully bedaubed with mud for purposes of concealment, served the various functions of Company Office, Storeroom, Officers' Mess and Company Commander's bedroom,

Rations, it is true, were not very regular in arriving, and the Canteens were still struggling northward through the mud; but, all things considered, it was a pleasant and peaceful time, in the present to be enjoyed, in the future to be the subject of regretful reminiscence.

Such war as we carried on was with the elements and the higher authorities rather than with the Turks. We adventured into No Man's Land, it is true, but only for the harmless purpose of shooting our Musketry Course on an improvised range. The whistle of the shell no longer sent us running into shelter, nor did the clatter of machine guns disturb our rest at night. Indeed, the officers of the Company in reserve even indulged in the unhallowed luxury of pyjamas.

One military operation we did undertake. About

a mile from our sangars was a deserted village, and from its one presentable building it was strongly suspected that stray Turks were in the habit of surveying with melancholy interest different portions of our line.

So one fine night we sallied forth, surrounded and captured the village, a feat none the less commendable because its entire garrison consisted of one pariah dog in an advanced state of mange.

We then blew up the sheikh's house and went home to breakfast. That every military operation undertaken during this period did not meet with the same success may be seen from the story of the Picnic Patrol, an episode in the annals of another battalion in our Division.

In the spring, as we all know, the fancies of general officers lightly turn to thoughts of war, and, as the three-day bouts of rain became less frequent and less intensive, rumours began to arrive with the rations. It seemed that we were not, as some of us had fondly hoped, to be allowed to lead our idyllic existence on the edge of the hills until the war was over, and whispers began to go round of a further advance as soon as the weather permitted.

The first stage, of course, was what is known as increased patrol activity, on the principle that it is clearly unfair to make a move without letting the other side know that you are coming. Small parties wandered forth into No Man's Land and, ascending on to high hills, explored the distant hori-

zon with field glasses and took compass bearings on to inaccessible peaks. Others, more daring, penetrated into villages, mostly deserted, and brought back articles of furniture for the Company Mess. If that had been all that they brought back no one would have minded and they would have been quite popular, but while the human inhabitants had departed there remained a large floating population of non-humans, a considerable portion of which hospitably insisted on seeing the intruders home.

Naturally the Turk became aware of these activities. He did not in the least object to our blowing up houses in deserted villages, or firing our Musketry Course in No Man's Land (if suitable precautions were taken against high shots), or even to our borrowing furniture from absent householders. But after all, war is war, and to flaunt yourself upon hill-tops and generally to act as advance agents of an offensive came perilously near to a breach of the mutual understanding.

This is just the point which the Picnic Patrol did not realize.

In origin it was quite a humble affair, in no way differing from other patrols, but the Providence which presides over the mental activities of Staff Officers had another destiny in store for it.

Its scope suddenly became more ambitious and its size swelled proportionately from a section to a platoon. A subaltern was to take command, and

his instructions were to make for a village about three miles from our line and not more than two from the Turks.

For some reason considerable publicity was given to the purposes of this patrol. Possibly the Division wished to convince itself and the higher authorities that it really was resuming martial activities ; possibly the absence of gossip of greater interest was responsible.

In any case everybody knew all about it, including the Turk, whose Intelligence Reports were largely compiled by faithful friends who sold Jaffa oranges to the troops, thus combining business with patriotism. Advertisement had its usual reward, and before very long a large number of well-meaning people began to clamour for permission to accompany the Patrol. It seemed to promise one of those enjoyable outings in which duty and pleasure are happily blended.

So a couple of artillery officers attached themselves on the pretext of reconnoitring gun positions ; a water-supply officer displayed a sudden interest in the wells of No Man's Land ; two engineers joined in with a view to planning the course of future roads ; a " G " officer from Division, on high matters of strategy intent, turned up as well ; one or two stray senior officers with nothing better to do surreptitiously melted into the growing throng ; and the tale was completed by a youthful and unknown Staff Officer, armed with a 12-bore sporting

gun who declared his intention of "having a whack at the partridges."

The other attached members, preferring to regard the expedition rather as a picnic than a shooting party, wore Sam Browne belts and carried walking-sticks.

As the entire gathering surmounted the sangars and started off down the hill a profane voice from among the troops was heard to inquire the date of Bank Holiday.

It was one of those jolly mornings of early spring in Palestine which we shall all remember. A few tufts of fleecy cloud clung round the heights of Mount Ephraim and told of the rain that was past. The ground was already throbbing with wakening life; between the crevices of the rocks little shreds of green were forcing their way upwards, and here and there were pale anemones, the snowdrops of the East, vanguard of the great army of wild-flowers which were shortly to come. Down the wadis trickled streams of water, and the hills were bathed in a sunshine which softened and humanized the grim greyness of the boulders.

And the Patrol began thoroughly to enjoy themselves.

History does not relate whether many partridges were slaughtered, whether the views were admired, or even whether the lunch was a success.

The Patrol, with adjuncts, were peacefully strolling up a little valley when to their dismayed astonish-

ment a machine gun opened on them at a range of eight hundred yards, and the crack of rifles disclosed the presence of a considerable number of Turks on their right flank.

The main body of the Patrol retired in good order and eventually regained the shelter of our sangars.

The young sportsman with the shot-gun who had strayed beyond hope of rescue in his pursuit of the partridge, also turned up—after dark and minus his gun, the absence of which he never succeeded in satisfactorily explaining.

One of the artillery officers, overlooked in the excitement, never turned up at all, but the Turks dropped an aeroplane message a few days later acknowledging with thanks the safe receipt of his maps.

The Staff Officer who, in the solitude of a neighbouring mountain, had presumably been ruminating on the art of warfare, coming suddenly face to face with its realities, immediately passed with honours in the art of taking cover. In fact, he continued to qualify behind a large rock until night came, when he scurried back by tortuous routes to our lines, which he finally reached, breathless but indignant, in the early hours of the next morning.

If, as is credibly reported, the Turk is able to appreciate a good joke, he must have enjoyed the whole business very much. Not so the members of the Picnic Patrol, who, after a certain amount of mutual recrimination and of having to endure

the tactless inquiries of friends as to when they were going to have another picnic, decided to bury the matter in oblivion.

To them my apologies are due for the exhumation of the horrid corpse.

#### IV

### In the Wadi Ballut

TO most of those of us whose lot it was to spend the spring and summer of 1918 in the tangle of hills loosely grouped under the name of Mount Ephraim, time will call up many memories, most of them not altogether pleasant. They will be memories of steep and savage hills, strewn with boulders, the size and length of which were a tax to the longest of legs and the best of winds ; of interminable roads (made with much toil by the long-suffering infantry), which became raging watercourses in wet weather and volcanoes of dust when it was dry ; of evil-smelling bivouac areas, in which scorpions crawled from beneath the stones and playfully nipped you as you lay at rest ; of reverse slopes which were " absolutely safe " from Turkish artillery fire—until half a dozen " 5·9's " arrived with your breakfast ; of deserted and half-ruined villages, infested by fleas but abounding in dark subterranean chambers which served as dugouts ; of night patrols in which you crawled about gingerly at the rate of half a mile an hour, occasionally dislodging avalanches of stones, and finally returning in a bruised and battered

condition reminiscent of a stiff game of Rugby football; finally, of April the 10th, when the wadis were blocked with the shells going up and the wounded going down, when the guns ran short of ammunition and the infantry painfully crawled up hills from the top of which concealed machine guns shot them down by scores and by hundreds.

But to us all Mount Ephraim is associated first and foremost with the Wadi Ballut, a deep and narrow valley winding from east to west and in and out of the lives of the men of the Key Division.

What the High Street is to an English country town, that was the Wadi Ballut to us. The little wadis, at the head of which we eked out a precarious existence, were very much akin to the small streets which lead into the main thoroughfare. To represent the local stores were the Quartermasters' camps, so placed that they could intercept the strings of camels which came up nightly with rations and water.

There, too, were the Field Ambulances and the Headquarters of the Brigades. Whether you required to wash yourself at one of the Divisional baths, or to sit at a Board to condemn mouldy rations, whether you were departing gaily with the leave party for Egypt, or moving (less gaily) to another mountain fastness, whatever your duty might be, or if you had no duty at all, your way always led you for a greater or less distance along the Wadi Ballut.

It was, as a consequence, no more possible to walk along it than along Princes Street, Edinburgh, without meeting at least half a dozen acquaintances, and the more hospitable of its numerous camps assumed inevitably the rôle of public-houses and tea-rooms.

It was a favourite exercise ground for stray generals, itinerant officers wrote indifferent verse about it, and it was cursed at least a hundred times a day for its length, its dust and its inevitability with all the harmless profanity of the British soldier.

So famous a thoroughfare merits some sort of description ; and indeed, divested of the trappings and the associations of war, it was a place full of attraction and interest. Tradition has it that the Ark of the Covenant passed along it on its way to Shiloh, which is quite likely. Nor were we by any means the first army to appreciate its importance. At its western entrance, where it meets the Plain of Sharon, stands the village fortress of Mejdél Yaba, like a sentinel at the gate. Leave it behind you and follow the easterly course of the wadi as it twists its way, a serpent of red mud and yellow sand, between rugged and treeless hills. The farther you penetrate the wilder and more rugged become its walls, until, high up upon Deir Kuleh you see a ruined house of the Knights of St. John, conspicuous, on closer inspection, for the Maltese crosses graven on the walls.

Farther on still is the great horseshoe bend, where

the wadi pushes north under the black cliffs of Benat Burry and then doubles on its tracks. On the peninsula thus formed stand the remains of a Crusaders' Castle ; nothing now shows but the vast blocks which once composed its foundations, and which serve as a haunt for snakes and jackals. Somewhere, too, in this neighbourhood a Roman villa was reputed once to have stood, but we never succeeded in locating it.

Farther eastward still the naked harshness of the mountains is softened by groves of silver-leaved olive trees ; on the lower slopes vines trail their long tresses from terrace to terrace, and from the shady recesses of the tributary wadis springs of water gurgle their way down to the main bed. Between the hills you catch swift glimpses of little grey villages perched on the mountain tops, their appearance suggesting the conventional castle in the scenery of the stage.

But in the spring the great glory of the wadi lies in its flowers. When the first force of the winter rains is spent, for a brief space the wadi becomes a river, a rushing torrent which sweeps all the staleness and foulness of the dry months down to the plain ; in a few weeks the desert is transformed into a garden of surprising beauty and variety. Here a great bank of poppies splashes the mountain side with scarlet, or the more delicate anemones, peeping between dainty green leaves, make a carpet fit for fairies to tread upon. Blue cornflowers,

yellow buttercups and daisies lie in such profusion that the individual is lost and it seems as though a giant hand had spilt great pools of glowing colour over the ground.

In the crevices of the rocks lurk quaint little orchids, and near the bubbling springs the maiden-hair hangs down in bunches of green spray. Most beautiful of all, perhaps, is a small flower, very like a lily-of-the-valley, which covers the earth in sheets of dazzling purity.

There is a kind of beauty that is almost painful to look upon, and few, I think, can have been so dull of soul as to have passed by the Crusaders' Castle in early April without being pierced by the almost unnatural fairness of the place.

And by way of contrast to all this there was war, with all its ugly realism, a bare mile to the north of the wadi. In fact, in the wadi itself, apart from camps and batteries and jolting limbers, there was much to remind us of what we would often have been glad to forget. Most conspicuous and most important to the wayfarer were the Turkish booby traps.

This was a favourite game throughout the long summer months. The Turks, of course, were fully aware of the multitudinous uses to which we put the Wadi Ballut. Had they been Germans, or even had they had an unlimited supply of ammunition, they might have made it a most unhealthy spot. But the Turk is the Turk, and makes up for a deficiency in shells by a commendable sense of humour. Pos-

sibly he realized that if he made the wadi impassable no one would try to pass and the guns would not be getting their money's worth, or possibly he found the labour of trying to dodge the frowning cliffs on the north side of the wadi too great a tax upon his energy ; or more probably he just thought that his way was more fun. His way was to mark down certain bits of the wadi and at irregular intervals drench them with a shower of shells.

Passage, in fact, became like one of those blood-curdling games which children play, in which they rush madly from one end of a long corridor to the other, while some concealed enemy tries to intercept them.

Who is likely ever to forget Windy Corner, how on approaching it you took a deep breath, stuck both your spurs into your horse, and stopped not until the corner had been rounded ?

The far side of this notorious passage on a busy afternoon used to bear a striking resemblance to the finish of the Grand National.

The moral effect of the booby traps was greatly enhanced by the peculiarly terrifying noise of the shells as they passed over the hills. Echo turned their whistle into a shrill scream and intensified many times over the noise of their explosion.

Apart from such bad patches as Windy Corner the wadi could be a pleasant place in which to take a stroll. Not that many of us had either the time or the energy to do so.

Moreover, there was one further drawback which has not yet been mentioned. The farther east you walked the more pleasant became your surroundings ; in fact, unless you were very careful you found yourself in a part of the wadi still held by the Turks, who doubtless used it for the same purposes as we did and were not at home to casual visitors from our side.

This may sound far-fetched, but many far-fetched things happened on Mount Ephraim, as the following episode may show.

There was once a party of infantry sent out to make a road. They started very early in the morning and by eleven o'clock had made considerable progress. Meanwhile, a body of Turks, ensconced behind some sangars on the top of a hill, watched with complacency the improvement of the communications of what they fondly trusted would still be part of the Turkish Empire at the end of the war.

The complacency, however, turned to indignation when the road crossed the intervening wadi and began to wind round the very hill which they (the Turks) were occupying.

There are limits even to what is allowed to roadmakers, and one of the minor engagements of the war at once ensued, in the course of which an inspecting Brigadier was nearly taken prisoner.

Finally the roadmakers, having exchanged their picks for rifles, brought the affair to a satisfactory

finish by storming and capturing the disputed position.

The war in these parts was, in fact, full of attractive incidents of this description. Witness the Easter Week experiences of "D" Company, shortly after their arrival in the Wadi Ballut.

It was in the early days before we had fully established our claim to the greater part of the wadi, and while the Turks in places were still uncomfortably close. An advance, therefore, had been made, with the effect that our line moved on from the heights immediately north of the wadi to the next row of hills.

All objectives were successfully captured except the village of Kefr, where a battalion of Germans, supported from another village in rear, maintained a stubborn resistance.

Mark the significance of this !

The new line lay along a tangle of hills, on the top of each of which was established a company of infantry, while in the middle, like a wolf among a flock of sheep, was the village of Kefr, much battered but still resisting.

So much the worse, you may think, for Kefr, but as it abounded in deep caves and subterranean rooms, the Germans were able to sit tight and laugh at our shelling.

Not so fortunately placed were the Ghurkas, who, as a result of the General Post, found themselves with Turks to the right of them, Turks in front of them, and Germans behind them.

Every one knows how singularly unpleasant it is to be fired at with machine guns from your immediate rear, and if you add bombing parties on either flank, a continuous fusillade from the front and a ground so rocky that digging was only possible to an average depth of about three inches, you have the position in a nutshell.

So "D" Company was despatched generally to lend its assistance wherever it might be required.

The first move was, of course, a night march to a spot close to the scene of operations, and by eleven o'clock "D" Company, slightly exhausted by the man-handling of Lewis gun panniers over several hundred yards of precipitous hillside, found themselves settled in a bottle-shaped depression just behind one of the Ghurka positions. There, by leading a quiet undemonstrative life and keeping indoors in the daytime, they trusted to escape the notice of the Turks.

Moreover, when daylight arrived, they proceeded to erect the usual gipsy encampment of bivouac sheets carefully "camouflaged" with scrub.

Their hopes of peace were soon rudely shattered.

It is well known that a British infantry company attached to an Indian regiment is fair game, just as much as is an Indian company attached to a British regiment. It also happened that on this particular morning every one of the Ghurka companies was engaged in a private affair of its own with the Turks immediately opposite.

These affairs were of a somewhat similar character in every case. A party of Turks, taking advantage of the convex slope of the hill, would creep forward within range of one of the Ghurka posts and discharge a rifle grenade. The Ghurkas would retaliate with a bomb, and possibly out of sheer light-heartedness let off a few score of rounds from the nearest Lewis gun.

The fun having thus begun, other developments would follow. The Turks would squeeze a little farther round the flank and discharge a few more grenades, or the Ghurkas would dash madly out to try and put an end to the persecution.

Meanwhile the guns from the rear brayed restlessly at anything so indiscreet as to loiter about a skyline, the German machine guns in Kefr swept the back of the Ghurkas' position with praiseworthy industry and a few concealed snipers added to the general effect with a dropping fire from all sorts of surprising angles.

In fact it was one of our lively days on Mount Ephraim.

Nor was "D" Company omitted from the programme.

The Company Commander had rashly given the co-ordinate of his position to the officer commanding the Ghurkas, who presumably had communicated it by telephone to his company commanders. Each of these latter was seized simultaneously with a plan of great strategical brilliancy. His flanks were

being attacked. A company of British infantry was sitting idle in the rear. Very well! Let them arise and advancing with irresistible *élan* drive the Turks back to their own hill. Nothing could be simpler or more effective, and runners were at once despatched to the company of British infantry to explain the necessity for their immediate presence. There were four companies of Ghurkas, and each company had at least one shaky flank.

One after another the runners arrived and deposited their messages in the hands of the Company Commander.

Most of the demands were quite modest, a couple of platoons on one side of the hill and one platoon on the other, but to meet them all a body of men would have been required not far short of a battalion in strength.

Something, however, had clearly to be done, and in a few minutes "D" Company were ready for action.

The rest of the day was spent in an up-to-date version of hide-and-seek, with variations, in which the snipers, the Germans in Kefr and the Turkish artillery played an intermittent but interested part. Our share consisted mostly of breakneck rushes down slopes which were calculated to intimidate any one but an Alpine climber, and a good deal of desultory dodging behind convenient rocks.

The whole affair created so much interest among the Turkish forces that the outflanking movements

were temporarily suspended and attention was concentrated upon our antics.

So the game went on merrily through the day, with very little damage to any one or anything except our knees and our wind. At an early stage in the proceedings, moreover, our Battalion Headquarters determined to take a hand in the game, or rather to start a fresh game of their own. The first intimation of their resolve arrived in the shape of a runner, breathless and perspiring, who for some minutes had been giving excellent target practice to a sniper about eight hundred yards away.

He thrust a message into the Company Commander's hand. It was torn open with the eagerness of one who awaits momentous orders. It contained a request for an immediate statement by all married officers of the number of their children and the amount that was being paid in the way of allowances.

A ribald answer was returned stating, more or less, that the children would probably become fatherless if an attempt to complete the return were made at the present juncture.

Undefeated, however, and undaunted by rain which began to fall heavily in the early afternoon, the Orderly Room proceeded to lead out trumps.

At three o'clock a consignment of sodden stationery arrived, accompanied by some searching questions about the last fortnightly paying out. The climax, however, came at four, a mule laden with canteen stores to be distributed at once to the troops.

How the mule ever got to where he did no one knows, but a few days later the stores were retrieved and came in very useful. At the moment, however, their arrival plunged the Company Commander into something very like hysteria.

With the coming of dusk hostilities slackened. The Turks presumably went home to tea, and the Orderly Room turned its attention to the peccadilloes of some other victim. "D" Company collected itself, wet and weary, at the head of a wadi, and the thoughts of all dwelt hopefully on the subject of food.

The Company Quartermaster-Sergeant and the cooks had remained behind at the original camping ground and, under the escort of a reliable guide, were to bring on the rations and water as soon as they arrived, under the cover of darkness.

Alas for the reliable guide, that Mrs. Harris of the war! At eight o'clock the Company Commander rose wearily to his feet and set out to look for the rations. It was somewhere close on midnight when he found them—straying in all innocence within hailing distance of the village of Kefr, with nothing between them and the enemy but a patch of rocky country.

How they were gently guided back, and how "D" Company ate a Gargantuan meal at two o'clock in the morning, is not the story written in all our memories?

"The most eventful Good Friday I have ever

spent," murmured the Mess President, as he opened another tin of bully beef.

And we all mumbled our agreement.

While "D" Company were thus employed a job of work had also been found for "C" Company.

They too had left the Wadi Ballut and climbing to the top of a high hill had installed themselves as garrison of a large village called Deir Ghussanieh. Great was their pride in their new quarters!

True, they had been thoroughly looted by the outgoing Turks, but to men who had been living for months in "bivvies" they stood for civilization and luxury. In some of the larger houses there were even beds, not, of course, to be slept in, but interesting as relics of a happier and almost forgotten way of life. There were books (in Arabic), a large assortment of nondescript garments, and in the Observation Post a Persian rug upon which a great many envious eyes were cast.

In these æsthetic surroundings "C" Company spent some uneventful days, enlivened by lightning visits from the Little Colonel, who made nothing of the two hours' climb from Battalion Headquarters.

They were not, however, destined to leave Deir Ghussanieh without one piece of excitement.

One morning the ceremony of "Stand to" was unduly prolonged by a thick mist which hung obstinately over the village and the ground sloping down to the wadi in front.

It was some little while after the usual time for

standing down when the mist began to lift, and even so the Company Commander thought it a wise precaution to send out a man to make sure that all was clear.

The watchers in the sangars saw him go out, heard a little later a shout, followed by a small fusillade of shots, and were gratified by his almost immediate reappearance. He tumbled breathlessly over the stone parapet and—rather later in the day—gave a convincing account of his adventures.

"I went out," he said, "and 'adn't gone more'n fifty yards, when I sees some chaps quite close. Thinking as 'ow they might be some of our chaps, s'no, as I'd run up against 'aving gone a bit wide in the mist I sez to them, ' 'Oo are you ? ' I sez. And they sez to me, ' Turk ! Turk ! ' and lets off their — rifles. So I comes back ek dum."

Following his return a lot of things had happened. First of all and most fortunately a gust of wind suddenly and finally blew away the mist and disclosed a large party of armed Turks who had apparently arrived with the intention of paying a morning call on Deir Ghussanieh.

*Afflavit Deus et dissipati sunt.*

A couple of lively minutes followed, during which the visitors beat a hurried retreat, influenced possibly by our Lewis guns, and leaving behind them some dead and wounded.

From a wadi near by could be distinctly heard the voice of an officer lifted up in lamentation and

objurgation to his fleeing troops. Apparently he shared the views of Gilbert's famous duke as to the correct position of a commander in action, and was distressed when the command ventured to differ.

This period of company warfare, however, came to an end during the first week in April, and the Regiment foregathered in strength and, it is hardly necessary to add, in the Wadi Ballut.

Great schemes were afoot, schemes which were never to find fruition.

There are some days on which nothing will ever go right, and April the 10th was one of those days.

A few barren heights dearly bought and a casualty roll well into the four figures, these were the outstanding results of some of the hardest and most unpleasant fighting that any of the Key Division can wish to see. And here and there in the Wadi Ballut, under the silvered shade of the olive trees and in the fading glory of the flowers rose the lines of little wooden crosses which told how the men of the West Country laid down their lives in the last and greatest of the Crusades.

## Getting Back to your Regiment

IT has frequently been observed how war, as fought by the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, assumed the appearance of a series of games.

Some of these were both harmless and amusing, others again were neither. Some we played with the Turks, and these at times were complicated by the fact that he did not always know our rules, nor we his ; but the vast majority we played among ourselves.

Of these by far the most popular, at least in the sense that it must have been played at one time or another by almost every officer in the Force, was Getting Back to your Regiment.

This was a form of amusement on the lines of the Race Game, a diversion of schoolroom memory which was played on a piece of cardboard scored with lines and decorated at intervals with formidable hedges and brooks. You threw dice and if you were lucky you advanced a considerable number of lines ; if not, you got caught in a hedge or fell into a brook and suffered divers penalties in consequence. There

is a deep moral underlying most childish games, and thus is youth equipped to cope with the problems of life, especially life in the Army.

The "post" in Getting Back to your Regiment was generally a Hospital at the Base, and for the average officer his last few days before discharge were spent in agitated inquiries and dark intrigues which had for their object a rapid and safe passage over the first few furlongs of the course. Every one who has attended a Race Meeting appreciates the necessity of getting a good start, and even those whose experience is confined to the delights of the Race Game will recall the importance of the opening throws of the dice.

Let us follow the fortunes of Second Lieutenant Bertram, of the 4th Westshire Regiment, inmate for two months of Ras-el-tin Hospital, Alexandria.

In front of him looms the first obstacle to be successfully negotiated at all costs, the Command Depot.

If he bungles his opening throw he will find himself at that desolate spot in the wilderness, many miles from civilization and connected with it by a tram of limited accommodation and precarious habits. Here he will do physical training at an indecently early hour of the morning, and spend the rest of the day in brushing the sand out of his hair and in studying the encyclopædic rules of his prison.

These are generally an exercise in the art of saying what you want to say in as many words and as bad

English as possible. No one, except possibly a few prowling A.P.M.'s, has ever been known to achieve a complete, unclouded knowledge of the rules of a Command Depot, but a breach of any one of them is followed swiftly by retribution at the hands of one of the myriad officials whose object in life would appear to be the harrying of convalescent officers.

However, we will suppose that Bertram is a young officer of discretion, and that he escapes from the Command Depot with nothing to his account worse than a threatening interview with the Commanding Officer.

He now approaches an even more formidable obstacle : in fact it is hardly to be called an obstacle at all ; obstacles are capable of being negotiated, and no one except a few very brainy people on G.H.Q. have ever succeeded in negotiating Kantara. Yet Kantara is the critical point in the game of Getting Back to your Regiment : pass Kantara and sooner or later, under Providence, you will reach your destination. But while you are at Kantara all sorts of startling possibilities beset you. You may find yourself suddenly posted to a battalion of Armenians or Syrians or " Jordan Highlanders,"<sup>1</sup> and required to report forthwith. You may go one morning to get a dressing for a septic sore the size of a sixpence and find yourself bundled contumeliously back to Hospital ; in other words, you are sent back to the beginning.

<sup>1</sup> Jewish battalions.

Or, more irrevocable still, you may be despatched at three hours' notice with a draft of surplus officers to France.

None of these more sensational catastrophes overtook Bertram, but like many another he was just kept by the Base Depot.

This keeping does not imply any special affection on the part of the authorities, or the presence of any work which you are urgently required to perform. It merely arises out of the constitutional reluctance of all Pharaohs, modern as well as ancient, "to let the people go." So the days pass into weeks and Bertram remains glued to Kantara like a fly to a flypaper. At rare intervals he earns his pay by taking Turkish prisoners for a walk or by sitting on one of the numerous Boards convened by the Commanding Officer.

Otherwise he leads the ordinary life of what is known as the Kantara Brigade. He visits Ordnance in the morning to buy something which he does not want, he has tea at the Y.M.C.A. in the afternoon, and goes to the Cinema in the evening. Such are the diversions of Kantara.

But the heart, even of a Pharaoh, is subject to moments of softness, and there came a blessed morning when he was summoned to the Orderly Room and told that he could proceed to rejoin his unit by the Leave train that night. A joyful and busy day followed. Camp kit was dispatched to the Regimental Store, the Lines Corporal was suitably bribed,

and his valise, weighing nominally 35 pounds, actually nearer 80, was stacked outside the Mess for the Motor Lorry to take to the station.

But the heart of Pharaoh, it will be remembered, invariably recovered its old form after lapses into softness, and at six o'clock Bertram was again hailed to the Orderly Room, to be greeted with the news that his journey was cancelled.

Restraining a torrent of blasphemy he wearily retrieved his camp furniture and unpacked his valise. Of course he should have understood that the Orderly Room Staff were only having a little game with him, a sort of side-show to the main event. In order to impress this upon him the false alarm is repeated two or three times, and then, when hope has almost fled, he is detailed to take charge of a draft and to be ready to entrain in four hours' time.

There are two ways of going up the line : one is the way of a gentleman, by the Leave train which departs at midnight and arrives at Ludd early the next morning ; the other is the way of an officer in charge of a draft. He may leave at midday, travels by the so-called Palestine Express, and arrives, if he arrives at all, late in the afternoon of the next day.

Other unpleasant things also happen to him.

All this being known to Bertram, the joy of departure was a little dashed for him. However, he had none too much time for contemplation.

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Forms had to be signed, instructions to be studied, rations to be drawn—all this in addition to his own packing, which fortunately practice had by now made perfect. Finally arrived the happy moment when he and a hundred heavily-laden men shook the sand of the Base Depot off their ammunition boots and started down the road to the station.

The Palestine Express has two salient qualities : it is composed exclusively of cattle trucks, and invariably there are more of these than the engine can manage.

A cattle truck is at best a poor shelter against the elements. On a hot day the sun beats in on you with a persistence that defies erections of waterproof sheets ; at night a chilly blast sweeps round the interior ; and when it rains you wake to find yourself lying, valise and all, in two inches of extremely dirty water.

But it is the length of the train which is really its and your undoing. It is impossible to make a journey in the Palestine Express without feeling a sympathy for the engine. He is so far from being master in his own house, or rather of his own train.

Observe the deplorable sequence of events on the day when Bertram was travelling up the line !

First of all came premonitory screams from the engine, followed by the usual noises of departure. The train gave a terrific clank, hurling all standing passengers violently to the ground, and remained motionless. The engine screamed again two or

three times, the train clanked and groaned and stayed obstinately where it was. Finally the engine stood on its hind legs and panted, the R.T.O.'s staff came out and pushed, and with a grinding and gnashing of teeth the Palestine Express moved slowly out of the station. That at least was the impression which its departure left on the minds of the passengers.

For the moment the engine's troubles were at an end. Far from it were those of the above-mentioned passengers. The movements of the Express were similar in character to those of a concertina in need of repair ; in other words, instead of a steady forward motion it proceeded in a series of gigantic leaps.

You stood up in your cattle truck and were at once hurled on to the prostrate form of a neighbour. You apologized and extricated yourself from his embrace and were then shot across the floor of the truck until checked by violent and painful impact with one of the beams at the side. In fact the only safe rule of travelling was not to move at all, or, if you had to move, to look out for some one soft to fall upon.

The difficulties of the engine began again when it tried to stop. It arrived at the station ,presumably put on the brakes, and was then carried shrieking with indignation some three hundred yards beyond the end of the platform.

But on this occasion its principal trial took place

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at dead of night. For some time the concertina movement had been more pronounced, the jolts more uncompromising, when suddenly with one last despairing clank the train parted in the centre, and the engine, under the fond delusion that it was really gaining the mastery over its encumbrance, sped joyfully forward. After the real facts of the matter had been discovered an interval of some hours elapsed while the missing portion was rounded up and joined on again.

With all these excitements to distract him Bertram did not spend a particularly good night, and it was a very broken slumber which was finally ended by daylight and the thunder of the waves on the beach of El Arish.

From now onwards the scenery became more interesting ; in place of the endless sand dunes of the desert there were occasional glimpses of the sea, and before long the train was winding its way among the low hills which shelter Gaza from the desert winds of the south.

“Grapes, grapes, grapes. Very good, very sweet, very cheap.”

It was the Promised Land at last, and its first manifestation was in full accordance with biblical tradition.

The train came to a stop among the cactus hedges and olive groves of Gaza, and there was an interval for breakfast, eaten in haste and supplemented by plenty of grapes bought at a reckless price from the

small native children who clustered round the train.

All bad things come to an end some time, and at two o'clock in the afternoon the train, belated but triumphant, drew in to the tented city of Ludd.

So Bertram was brought to the next obstacle in the game, the Corps Reinforcement Camp.

The peculiar characteristic of this spot was that the officer was accorded much the same sort of treatment as is supplied in Government offices to inconvenient documents. He was filed for future reference. He was neither ill-treated nor overworked; his nerves were not shattered by false alarms, nor was his brain addled by Boards and Courts of Inquiry. He was simply ignored.

There he was, and in Heaven's good time, especially if he made himself sufficiently troublesome to the Orderly Room, he would pass on.

In the meantime he must sit like Patience, not on a monument, but in his bell tent; otherwise there was the tower of the Forty Martyrs at Ramleh to be explored, and there were unlimited omelets to be consumed at the Ludd Refreshment Tent.

Bertram, having by this time accumulated a certain amount of experience of the correct way of playing the Race Game, set to work at once. He invaded the Orderly Room at all hours of the day, he interrupted the Adjutant's afternoon nap, he waylaid him on his way to his meals. Wherever that unfortunate gentleman went, there was Second

Lieutenant Bertram, with an ingratiating smile on his face, and on his lips the perpetual inquiry, "When are you going to send me on?"

The importunate widow would have made a most successful soldier; and by due attention to her methods Bertram succeeded in convincing the Adjutant that peace was only to be obtained by his immediate dispatch to the Divisional Rest Camp at Wilhelma.

So one morning, some days after his arrival at Ludd, Bertram took the road once more, followed by fifty mixed reinforcements and preceded by a guide who, after faithfully leading his charges along all the dustiest roads in the vicinity of Ludd, finally gave up the ghost in the midst of a maze of cactus hedges. In a hoarse voice he confided to Bertram that he had never been to Wilhelma before and that he neither knew the way there nor where they were at the moment.

There is something to be said for candour.

Bertram took charge of the situation and by dint of asking the way of every one whom he met eventually got on to the right road.

In the distance appeared Wilhelma, a view of red roofs peering from the shady depths of eucalyptus trees, like some peaceful English village which had strayed into incongruous surroundings.

The neat little Lutheran church, the inevitable Bier Halle, the lines of houses, all much alike, and all surrounded by trim gardens, the furniture (when

you entered) of the houses themselves, the plush sofa without which no Teutonic drawing-room is complete, the "New Art" knick-knacks and the creaking harmonium, all told their tale.

But now the inhabitants were gone and their place was taken by a motley population of town majors, supply officers and different varieties of commandants.

Bertram's destination was the Divisional Rest Camp, and with his arrival his troubles were ended. The Commandant and Adjutant were both officers of the Regiment, and the camp itself, being Divisional, was quite a family gathering. The Adjutant darted out and disposed of the draft, while the Commandant led Bertram to the Mess, where over a long and cooling drink the latest gossip was exchanged.

"The Regiment? Oh, it's at Rafat now!"

Loud groans from Bertram. Rafat's reputation was notorious.

"But they're fairly comfortable. Johnny's" (Johnny is our pet name for the Turk) "keeping quite quiet, and limbers come down twice a week for Canteen stores. The Little Colonel? Oh, he's going strong."

"So's Benito" (the second in command). "The Fat Boy's leaving the Regiment, going to start a Divisional Concert Party. Let's see, you're 'D' Company; they're in support, working parties all day and detached posts at night." And so on.

Bertram begins to feel that he is home at last,

for to an officer in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force the only home which the Middle East contains is his Regiment. As Bertram tells the Commandant : "There's only one place out here where you're treated like a rational being, and that's with the Battalion."

At Wilhelma a brief stay is necessary, until such time as the Regiment, becoming aware of your presence, sends down transport.

The quality of this will depend upon the mood of the Transport Officer. Should it be good a horse will be forthcoming for your personal use, if medium a mule, but if there have been recriminations with Brigade or a "strafe" from the C.O., you will probably have to face a walk of close on twenty miles, while a solitary mule, dispatched with some reluctance, carries your valise.

Bertram's luck was in and he had only been a couple of days at the Rest Camp when his transport arrived, a horse for him and two mules, one for the groom and one for his valise.

So at eleven o'clock in the morning he bade good-bye to his friends, mounted his horse and turned towards the Hills.

A long and monotonous ride lay before him. Gone was the glory of March, the mantle of wild-flowers that lay upon the hillside.

The summer sun beat fiercely on to the parched ground, the road was carpeted with a thick reddish dust, passing for mile after weary mile between

barren rocks and the bare, scarred slope of the hill.

Occasional limbers and G.S wagons emerged from clouds of dust, and now and then a string of slow-moving camels compelled a halt and a torrent of profane expostulation. Then the blue-garbed Camel Transport Egyptians, with strange cries and gestures, shepherded their flock to one (generally the wrong) side of the road.

So he rode past Tireh-in-the-Hills, where the old front line lay, and Rentis half hidden by supply dumps, Lubban perched on the top of its conical mountain, and the slopes of Diurah crowned with woods of olive and fig trees. Then a gentle rise, and five hundred feet below lay the red and yellow bed of the Wadi Ballut.

Bertram rode down the big zigzag road, crossed the dry bed of the wadi, and saw with relief the bell tent, nestling well under the shelter of the hills on the north side, which marked the residence of the Quartermaster.

One more throw of the dice and the game of Getting Back to your Regiment was finished.

First, however, must come tea with the Quartermaster, a solemn rite not to be omitted by the returning officer. Nor was the Quartermaster's tea to be despised. We have his word for it that it was ration tea, so that its special virtue must be traced to the hand that brewed it. Certainly it was better than any other tea that ever was made by an Army cook.

More gossip, punctuated on the part of the host by lightning interviews with the Quartermaster-Sergeant, a heated exchange of compliments with an old enemy, the Transport Officer, and some sarcastic remarks to the water man.

Then, refreshed in mind and body, Bertram started on foot up the little Wadi Emir which led to Rafat and the Regiment.

Rafat remains an unhallowed memory to the Key Division.

It was a small village situated on a hill well in front of the rest of our line. In fact it was our solitary outpost across the deep Wadi Lehham, which ran behind it and parallel with the Wadi Ballut.

From commanding positions in front and on either side the Turks would watch our every action with languid interest. They must have felt towards Rafat much as a cat feels towards a mouse which is in its power.

The situation, however, was not quite so unpleasant as it might have been. So long as we left them alone they were content to do the same by us. But let our guns make themselves objectionable, as occasionally they thought fit to do, and retribution as sure and as merciless as fate would fall upon Rafat.

Later on, enormous supplies of sandbags and material for dugouts arrived and improved the security, not to mention the comfort, of a position on which it was nearly impossible to dig a trench.

Even so, Rafat was never a restful spot.

Thinking a little ruefully of these little drawbacks Bertram walked up the Wadi Emir. At the top of the narrow pass between Emir and Khurbet Balatah he fell in with the Adjutant, who undertook to guide him the rest of the way. They struck off to the left across a broad plateau with a fine view of the country in front.

"That's Arara," said the Adjutant, pointing to a height which towered over the village of Rafat, now visible about a thousand yards away. "That's where the Cidershires had such a hot time in April. And on the left you can see Three Bushes, which the Russetshires took and then had orders to evacuate. You see," he went on with a cheerful smile, "they're all round us."

Bertram stepped out feeling horribly large and conspicuous.

"Of course they can see us quite distinctly," said the Adjutant, "but they never bother to fire at just one or two people."

Another twenty minutes' climb brought them across the Wadi Lehham and about half-way up the hill on the other side.

The first visit, of course, was to Battalion Headquarters, the site of which was easily identified by the presence of the Little Colonel.

Months of monotony had not availed to quench his enthusiasm, and in a few moments he was eagerly expounding some new device which was being constructed for the better security of Rafat.

Before three minutes had elapsed Bertram was committed to a personal inspection of the Rafat defences that very evening.

"But," as he explained afterwards to the Adjutant, "it all helps me to realize that I'm back with the Regiment again."

It was so typical of the Little Colonel. Impulsive, whole-hearted, enthusiastic, each individual moment for him was loaded with an importance which obscured both past and future. One moment he would be smiting some one with his thunders, the next he would have completely forgotten that he had done so. With fuller acquaintance it was easier to remember that he never willingly hurt the feelings of any man, and that his whole soul was bound up with the welfare of the Regiment. And to every man in it, officer or private, he was ready, in the truest sense of the word, to be a friend.

After leaving Battalion Headquarters a short climb across the rocks brought Bertram to his final destination, "D" Company.

In the distance the bivouac sheets spread out among the rocks gave the place the appearance of being deserted save for the presence of some one's washing hung out to dry. It was only when you approached and noted the recumbent figures crouching underneath the scanty shelters that it was possible to realize that an entire Company was there.

At the bottom of the encampment four empty

"fanatis" and a smouldering fire showed the chosen abode of the Company cooks.

These form a fraternity not lightly to be interfered with. Foursquare to all the winds of criticism they stand, secure in the knowledge that behind them lurks their traditional ally, the Company Quartermaster-Sergeant, and that if they do not know much about cooking the Company Commander knows less. The latter's position, indeed, is one of some delicacy. The good cook will commit any crime for the good cause, and the best record is one of branches torn secretly from olive trees to supplement a short ration of wood, and of water drawn at dead of night from one of the Water Supply Officer's pet wells.

In return, the Company Commander is expected to avert his military gaze from their dress and general appearance, and not to interfere unduly with their internal arrangements.

Should he fail to fulfil his part of the contract something will go very wrong with the officers' dinner that night. No blame can be attached to anybody in particular, but the horrid fact will remain.

As Bertram approached, the chief cook, Private Dale, emerged from his lair, clad in an ancient shirt and a pair of trousers the colour of which might originally have been either khaki or white.

After greeting Bertram he placed a half-smoked cigarette behind his ear and going down on his hands and knees, proceeded to encourage the languid fire into a blaze.

He then produced a large piece of raw meat from a dixie and lovingly caressed it with a pair of black hands.

"Nice piece of meat for the officers' dinner to-night, sir," he remarked in ingratiating tones, and Bertram passed hurriedly on his way.

Next in importance to the fraternity of the cooks is that of the Signallers. These lead a retiring existence, preferably in the gloomy shelter of a cave. If no cave is forthcoming they produce many "bivvy" sheets and construct a dwelling-place which shall in their opinion reproduce as nearly as possible the correct atmosphere of a telephone office. The atmosphere produced may be correct, but is undeniably bad; perhaps it is intended to discourage visitors from making a protracted stay.

Signallers are very domestic folk, and, plunged in the dark recesses of their temporary home, they lead a life of dignified retirement, emerging only when the call of duty or the craving for sustenance impels them, conversing in unintelligible language with their friends in other signal stations, and politely ignoring the rest of the Company.

They too have their share of the corporate spirit, in a form peculiar to them. Some indication of it may be obtained by overhearing sundry conversations, slightly sarcastic, which periodically take place. The line has been broken, some message has been mislaid, in short, some hitch in communication has taken place. In any case the "D" Company Signallers

are as infallible as any Pope, and it is hinted with laboured courtesy that if Headquarters were to set their own house in order instead of throwing mud at the immaculate dwellings of other people, it would be to the advantage of all concerned.

In fact, the motto of the Signallers, like that of the cooks, might well be, "Nemo me impune lacessit."

Yet their esprit de corps is very real. They are determined that as far as is humanly possible the Company Commander shall never lose touch with Headquarters (whatever may be the Company Commander's feelings in the matter). That is why, when the Company is doing an attack, a little behind the firing line may be seen a youth, faint but pursuing, whose sole offensive weapon is a large coil of telephone wire.

Close to the haven of the Signallers is Company Headquarters.

Here Bertram's eyes were gladdened by certain well-known permanent fixtures—the table composed of Lewis gun boxes, covered by the worn green cloth brought in triumph from Jerusalem by the Company Commander; the battered *yakhdans* in which the Mess stores were kept; the four "bivvy" sheets, loosely tied together, which served as a shelter from the sun; and last, but by no means least, the Mess President himself, an entrenching tool in one hand and a piece of wood in the other, engaged as usual in some small "job about the house."

"Hullo, Bertram!" were his first words. "You owe the Mess fifty piastres, you know. I'll take it now, thanks."

"A large drink of lime juice is mine, please," is Bertram's reply; and as it is produced: "Same old chipped mug and same old mixture of creosol and mud! To think of lunch at the Mohammed Ali——" A chorus of indignant groans from the neighbouring "bivvies" cuts short his reminiscences and reveals the presence of the other members of the Mess.

One by one they extricate themselves from their fly nets and emerge to greet the newly returned. Disreputable figures, all of them, clad in shirts, shorts and sandshoes, without ties or putties.

Such are the sartorial fashions of Mount Ephraim!

Some of the more intimate gossip of the Company is expounded, the details of Private Naylor's last crime and punishment, the internal politics of the batmen (which are generally very complicated), the latest iniquity of the Orderly Room, and rumours of a revolution among the cooks.

Then there are old friends in the Company to be visited, beginning with the Sergeant-Major, most reliable of soldiers, the mainstay and support of the Company Commander. Nothing can go badly wrong so long as the Sergeant-Major's black moustache remains waxed.

Should the awful and the unexpected ever happen, and the moustache droop limply from his upper lip,

it may be taken for granted that the worst is impending.

Then there is Corporal Ginger, crowned with a mop of brilliant red hair, who has to be told privately to seek an interview with the Company barber.

There are Foley and Wood, genial Cockneys who have strayed into our Westshire yard and keep it lively with terrific bouts of repartee.

There is Sergeant Holman, dour and forbidding of appearance, but capable at the right time and in the right place of surprising relaxation.

There is—but in fact there are something over one hundred good fellows, the men of "D" Company.

So we will leave Bertram. The sun is slipping behind the Hill of Ballut and the shadows are creeping up the wadi. In the background his batman is wrestling diligently with his "bivvy," and other batmen are laying the Mess table for dinner; there is a pleasant hum of voices and a still more pleasant odour of food; and best of all, he is "back to the Army again."

## VI

### The Common Task

THE War has destroyed most of our illusions about war. It has undone, it is to be hoped for ever, the effects of a determinedly romantic education, which began with highly-coloured pictures of the Balaclava Charge and ended (at best) with an intellectual appreciation of the strategy of the Peninsular Campaigns. They may both have been magnificent, but unfortunately they were not war.

To one of Wellington's veterans the most significant memory was probably neither Salamanca nor Talavera, nor yet the bloody breach of Badajoz, but some night of wet misery on the cold stones of a Spanish mountain, or a day of hard marching through the withering heat of a summer day. On the Crimean soldier neither the Balaclava Charge nor the *mêlée* of Inkerman can have impressed themselves so permanently as the weary weeks of waiting in the death-haunted trenches before Sebastopol.

And with this last and greatest war the lesson has been given again with greatly added emphasis. There are romance and adventure still, but they are

tiny bits of driftwood floating in a fathomless ocean of black, unrelieved monotony.

War, in fact, may be described as consisting of long periods of boredom punctuated at intervals by moments of acute and almost painful excitement. Indeed, what none of the high ideals of Pacificism have been able to accomplish, neither the fellowship of man, nor the sanctity of human life, nor the rights of nationality, a far lower principle is in a fair way to achieve. At present we clamour for a League of Nations, not primarily because we regard war as wicked or dangerous or economically disastrous, but because we know by experience that it is extremely dull.

This may possibly be regarded as a pessimistic view of the whole matter, and I can only answer that a few months' campaigning on Mount Ephraim (modern style) are calculated to make any man a pessimist, at any rate for a time. The passage of years, no doubt, will soften the bitterness of recollection for those of us who survive, and in the fullness of time we may even come to the point of telling tales to our children and assisting them to bowl over lead soldiers with the help of tin cannon.

But just at present the other and what we may call the realistic side of war is very much with us. Battles are all very well in their way, but to us the war means mainly a routine of dull duties and irritating discomforts.

Let me, therefore, leave on record at least one

proof of this conviction, in the shape of a painfully veracious account of a whole day in the life of "D" Company, while stationed in support on the steep slope behind the village of Berukin.

The day began at an hour at which respectable citizens would be comfortably snoring in their beds, but at which belated revellers would probably be returning in crumpled evening dress to the bosom of their families—in fact, somewhere between three and four in the morning.

A sleepy Signaller, something after the fashion of the London milkman, is making his rounds.

His first visit is to the Company Commander, whose head and boots protrude from either end of a "flea-bag," laid quite illegally on one of the Company's stretchers.

A brief dialogue ensues.

"Time to 'Stand to,' sir."

"Grmph!"

"Half-past three, sir."

"Grmph!"

"Ought to be getting up, sir."

"That's or ri'. I'm awake." The words are accompanied by a suspicious snuggling into the recesses of the "flea-bag" and an ensuing restfulness which belies the truth of the assertion.

The Signaller regards his Captain darkly for a moment, and then, mindful of certain stern instructions received, seizes the protruding boots, gives them a vigorous shake and follows it up with a couple of

good pulls. He then retires hurriedly, pursued by some very bad language, and a trowsled figure disentangles itself painfully from a muddled pile of blankets.

The Signaller repeated the process with variations on the other officers and ended up with the Sergeant-Major, whom he treated with similar firmness but with rather more deference.

From the darkness came low calls of "Stand to," and in a few minutes the hillside was dotted with figures crawling out of bivouacs and stretching themselves like animals issuing from their lairs.

Below, the crackling of a fire told the welcome news that the cooks were busy with gun-fire tea.

Somewhere, rather less than a mile away, the Turk was doing the same thing, had been doing it even as we had been doing it, day after day and month after month.

"Stand to," in fact, is one of the ceremonies of modern war. It is also the worst episode of the day. Whether it is because vitality is low at four o'clock in the morning, or because it is an hour at which Providence clearly intended a civilized man to be in bed, there is a general depression about, a tendency to reflect resentfully on lost comforts and to avoid unnecessary intercourse with any one else.

Even in the summer there is a distinct chill in the air just before dawn, and if you are wise you will make one of the silent group standing round the cookhouse fire.

With the arrival of the gun-fire tea the world begins to appear a slightly less gloomy place, and you even feel strong enough to bid a gruff good morning to your nearest neighbours.

Eastward there is a faint glow in the sky ; one by one the stars flicker and disappear like candle-lights in a cottage window ; we can just see the great mass of Tin Hat Hill looming formless and grey across the Wadi Berukin.

Presently a ribbon of opal and pearl appears like a trailing fillet round the brow of the hill, and against it the outline is thrown out, black and clear-cut, flecked here and there with little wisps of mist.

The gentle wind of dawn blows fitfully down the wadi. We can now see the detail of the opposite slopes, distorted and misshapen in the half light. There are boulders which look like sleeping monsters, trees like the ghosts of walking men, and bushes as mysterious and impalpable as clouds.

Tin Hat now stands out against a background of fine amber, and the jagged and curving outline of the hill seems to be carved by the hand of a great craftsman.

The whole sky becomes swiftly penetrated with light and the top of Toogood Hill turns suddenly to pure gold. The dawn has come and daylight begins to pour in streams down all the little wadis.

“ Stand down ! ”

Slowly we go back to our “ bivvies.” It is five

o'clock, and the next two hours are the best sleeping hours of the day.

In a few minutes the bivouac ground is silent and apparently deserted, except for a couple of cooks leisurely preparing breakfast.

Shortly after seven the waking-up process is repeated, this time by batmen with mugs of shaving water.

You crawl to a sitting position and fumble for shaving material in the head of your valise. Outside the batman lays out a waterproof sheet in a hole in the ground and empties half a bucket of water into it. Your bath is now ready. You come out of your "bivvy" and note favourably that the slope is covered with figures in different stages of disattire, shaving and washing themselves out of a variety of mugs, mess-tins and (sad to say) bomb buckets.

We do not spend a great deal of trouble over our toilet on Mount Ephraim, knowing as we do that a little later on in the day the less we wear the less uncomfortable we shall be. So the ordinary dress for an officer consists of a shirt, a pair of shorts, shoes and stockings. On his head he wears a topee, generally rather battered, in one hand is a fly-whisk and in the other his steel helmet, each in its way a protection against one of the twin enemies of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. So armed, he makes his way to the Mess, a sufficient description of which has already been given.

The Mess President is engaged, knife in hand, in a surgical operation on a loaf of bread, which in parts has turned to a delicate green.

"More mouldy bread," he remarked cheerfully; "why can't they give us biscuit in this weather?"

"The men's ration is worse than this," said the Pessimist gloomily. "I saw it."

The Captain swore wearily.

"Only yesterday," he said, "I gave them permission to eat their Iron Ration biscuits, and we had a Board and condemned the bread in the evening. But it doesn't seem to be any use reporting the Supply people. They simply say they can't help it."

Two batmen arrived, one with a large kettle full of strong tea, the other carrying a dixie lid loaded with rashers of bacon.

"You'll want the sauce this morning, sir," said he of the bacon mysteriously. There was some hard sniffing and a tense voice demanded the immediate presence of the tomato sauce.

"The situation," said the Pessimist, "calls for the exercise of camouflage."

However, it is wonderful what a good breakfast can be made off bacon slightly turned and bread slightly mouldy, washed down with draughts of strong tea and generous helpings of jam.

Afterwards pipes were lit and the plans for the day were discussed.

There was to be the usual rifle inspection first of all.

After that there were working parties. One party was to continue improving the path to Battalion Headquarters, another was to deepen and repair the communication trench leading to the Berukin defences, and a third was to carry on with the enlarging of a big cavern just behind the bivouac area, and the further opening up of a second entrance to it. This cavern was the Company dugout, and in moments of bombardment could comfortably hold one hundred men.

The officers then departed on their various duties, the Pessimist, Rodwell and Dimsdale to inspect rifles, and the Mess President, like a good housekeeper, to interview the cook.

Hovering on the outskirts of the Mess was the Sergeant-Major, moustaches of course beautifully waxed, and a notebook in his hand.

"Good morning, Sergeant-Major."

"Good morning, sir." Meetings at "Stand to" do not count.

"Any one to come up to-day?"

"No, sir, but there's just one or two little things I should like to see you about."

The Sergeant-Major comes in and sits down, and domestic matters peculiar to "D" Company are discussed in some detail.

There are two vacancies for short leave to Egypt and the names and claims of the different candidates are carefully compared. There is a mysterious and complicated controversy between the cooks and the

sanitary men, intimately connected with a sullage pit, upon which judgment has to be made. There is the business of Corporal Howard who thinks that he ought to have been made an acting Sergeant and has not been, and of Lance-Corporal Plimsoll who ought to be an acting Corporal and is not. The former must receive a straight hint and the latter the first vacancy.

And there are half a dozen other matters which can have no interest to any one not in "D" Company.

The conference closed, the Captain collected a Sam Browne belt and prepared to go the rounds of the working parties.

His first visit was to the gang which was excavating at the cavern. This was, as fatigues go, a popular job, and was performed with more gusto than would be given to the making of a path or the digging of a trench. The N.C.O. in charge was Sergeant Holman, a man peculiarly fitted for his task. People have different ideas of happiness, and Sergeant Holman's was perhaps a little strange. He only asked to be given a pick, a henchman with a crowbar in reserve, and one of those large, apparently immovable boulders which are so plentiful on Mount Ephraim. Sooner or later, maybe after several hours, the boulder would give up the unequal contest, and Sergeant Holman would be a happy man.

On this occasion he had begun by playing the dignified part of supervising N.C.O., but his restraint had not lasted very long.

At the moment of the Captain's arrival a critical stage had been reached in a struggle with a solid block of stone which lay across the side of the Emergency Exit from the cavern. One man was hanging on to a crowbar, two more were chipping away with entrenching tools, and Sergeant Holman himself, in the seventh heaven, was levering the whole mass outwards with a pick. From the aperture already made appeared a pair of legs and a cloud of dust, and the latter was being removed by a couple of men with baskets. A visit inside the cavern disclosed more men with shovels and baskets, clearing out of the interior an accumulation of earth which had fallen from the roof.

The entire party were thoroughly enjoying themselves. The Captain and the Sergeant-Major bent themselves double and came out of the cave. Far below, at the bottom of the hill, were the tiny figures of the second working party, improving the path.

The sun was now high in the heavens and the day was becoming unpleasantly hot.

"I suppose we ought to go down and see how they are getting on," said the Captain, mopping a dripping brow.

"Yes, sir," replied the Sergeant-Major in a tone of voice which certainly meant something else. "They seem to be working very hard, sir," he added hopefully.

"They do, and"—a little grimly—"I think I can see the reason,"

Out of the trees at the bottom of the wadi a small figure emerged and drew near to the working party. Even in the distance it was possible to distinguish a pair of neat khaki leggings.

The working party had become unusually industrious.

"The Commanding Officer, sir," said the Sergeant-Major.

The small figure approached the nearest group of workers and watched them for a minute or two. Then he seized a pick from one of the men and set to work vigorously. The majority of the working party, evidently rather relieved, straightened their backs and looked on.

"On second thoughts," said the Captain, "I shan't go down to the wadi after all. The Colonel's probably coming up here and may want me to go on to Berukin with him. Shan't want you any more, Sergeant-Major."

The latter saluted and retired with his notebook into his "bivvy," while the Captain strolled off to put on boots and putties. He knew from experience that it was necessary to be ready for all emergencies.

In a little over a quarter of an hour the Colonel arrived on the scene, hot and breathless, but brimful of energy. He, however, accepted a drink of lime juice and water and sat down for a few minutes in the Mess. He spent this breathing space in explaining the intricacies of a French sap which he was proposing to introduce into the Berukin defences.

There was also a new patrol programme to be expounded and, on the Captain's part, any gossip of interest to be extracted.

"And now," said the Little Colonel, "we'll go up to Berukin and I'll show you where I'm going to make that sap."

The village was on the very top of the hill, and, considering that it had been soundly battered first by our guns and latterly by those of the Turks, was in a fairly good state of repair. The houses were all crowded together in what we should consider uncomfortable proximity, and there was no thoroughfare along which it would have been possible to propel any vehicle larger than a wheelbarrow. Every house possessed at least one semi-underground chamber, which, strongly protected by sandbags, made an excellent dugout. And every dugout, it is hardly necessary to add, was provided with a picturesque name entirely out of keeping with its character.

Otherwise it was like a score of other positions on Mount Ephraim. There was an Observation Post from which it was possible to view the distant Turkish sangars. There were several little trenches, each of them fitted with a Lewis gun emplacement, none of them holding more than a dozen men. There was an imposing Company Headquarters, in a domed building, "but," as the officer inside explained, "we don't stop in here when they start shelling."

And there were some really artistic coloured

sketches of the whole position which had to be duly admired.

It was twelve o'clock before the visit ended, and the Little Colonel, refusing all offers of lunch, began rapidly to descend the hill on his way back to Headquarters.

The Captain, after borrowing a bottle of whisky from the Officer commanding "B" Company, returned at a more leisurely rate to his own territory.

By now the full heat of the day was smiting the bare slopes ; the grey rocks sucked in the heat and gave it out again in double strength. Under the flimsy shelter of the Mess bivouac sheets a cloud of flies hovered over the preparations for lunch.

It was not an elaborate meal, in the first place because no one wants to eat much at midday of a Palestine July, and in the second place because the flies, quite undeterred by bottles of fly-killer and the whirling of whisks, insisted on sharing each mouthful of food.

A slice of bully beef and some bread and jam were enough for everybody except Rodwell, possessor of an enormous appetite, who opened a tin of veal paste and managed the contents almost single-handed.

Lunch was almost over when the peace was disturbed by a couple of our guns. Really they were firing from a position close to the Wadi Ballut, but so great was the reverberation that they seemed to be quite near.

"That's the stuff to give them!" said Rodwell gleefully as the shells hissed overhead. Rodwell had joined us quite recently and had seen very little of war.

"Just you wait!" growled the Pessimist, and, as more shells passed over: "Silly asses! Why can't they leave well alone?"

"We might have an agreement," said Dimsdale sleepily. "If we don't——"

"Listen!"

In the distance came a faint cry like the wailing of a lost soul, louder and louder and louder!

With unanimity and an entire lack of dignity the Mess flung themselves flat against the wall of rock behind.

CRASH!

A geyser of dust rose about fifty yards away and a moment later fragments of earth and stone came pattering down on to the bivouac sheets.

The Captain rose to his feet and clutched his steel helmet. "The time has arrived," he said, "for the transaction of urgent business with the signallers. Come on, all of you!"

The signallers inhabited a little cave conveniently situated just behind the Officers' Mess. Thither the luncheon party adjourned, their progress accelerated by another projectile of a different kind. It came with a scream and an ear-splitting crack, just overhead, while a portion whistled across to the other side of the wadi and ended in a second small explosion

and a puff of grey smoke. It rejoiced in the name of "Cut and Come Again," did very little damage as a rule, but made a most unpleasant and demoralizing noise.

For the next half-hour there was a continuous exchange of compliments between the artillery on either side, while the officers of "D" Company sat rather uncomfortably in the stuffy atmosphere of the signallers' home. A few yards away the remainder of the Company were collected in Sergeant Holman's cavern.

"I knew this would happen," said the Pessimist in tones of gloomy satisfaction. "We simply asked for it. All I hope is that if ever we have another show it will be against our own artillery. I dislike them much more than I dislike the Turk."

As soon as peace had returned to the hills, the cave was left to its lawful inhabitants, and the officers went off to their "bivvies" for the siesta which the climate enjoins and which the Turks had postponed.

Mosquito nets were drawn down to exclude the flies, a deep silence fell on the land, and the afternoon wore slowly away.

At four o'clock there is a general stir.

Mugs of tea are brought to the Mess table, a collection of messages from Battalion Headquarters are handed in by a Signaller, and some Canteen stores arrive for distribution. The Mess President, whose job it is, assisted by a Lance-Corporal, is soon

busy opening boxes, checking tins of apricots, sardines and herrings, and apportioning them to the different platoons.

The sun is a little lower in the sky, the heat has abated some of its fierceness, and the flies seem to be wearying of their day's activities.

Visitors from other companies begin to appear, to pay a passing call and to fortify themselves on their way with a mug of tea and the local news.

Presently a shock of red hair appears above the terrace on which the Mess stands, and a shout announces the arrival of the doctor.

He is a very old friend, having contrived for many years and on three continents to remain attached to the Regiment. He drops in periodically on the different companies, generally forgets what he has come to see about and invariably leaves some personal possession behind.

There is no one in the whole Regiment about whom so many good stories are circulated: as to how he arrived in Mess one morning clad absent-mindedly in his tent companion's breeches—and how the latter recovered them; as to how he once appeared at breakfast without a tie at all, and the next day with two ties; and of yet another morning when the slumbers of the Government of India at the camp of Kingsway were disturbed and their sensibilities deeply shocked by the spectacle of a small red-headed man in pyjamas, armed with a revolver, pursuing

with a burst of rapid fire a lethargic owl which had perched on his tent.

"Come in, Doc., and have a drink." A bottle of whisky is fished out of one of the *yakhdans* and water produced from an improvised "chargal" which is hanging on a tree hard by.

"Well, I oughtn't to stop," says the Doctor. "I just came along to see you about something. Let's see, what was it?"

"Never mind about that, Doc.!" says a malicious officer. "Drink your whisky and tell us all the news."

The Doc endeavours to do as he is bid.

"By the way," he says eventually, "I shall have to start inoculating again in a day or two: cholera and para-typhoid."

"Well, mind you put the right stuff in this time," remarks the Captain quite at random. "Do you remember the time when you inoculated us all for the wrong thing?"

"Which time? I never did!" retorts the Doc. angrily, giving himself away badly. A stern cross-examination ensues and finally a full confession is drawn.

"Since you know so much," says the Doc. good-humouredly, "you may as well know the rest. I admit that when we were at Kenikhet a considerable portion of the Regiment were, accidentally and unknown to themselves, rendered immune to Oriental Plague."

There were loud cheers from the audience, and the Doc. rose and said good-bye.

Hardly had his head disappeared below the terrace than up it bobbed again.

"I remember," he shouted back triumphantly, 'what it was I came about. I want you to see that your cooks keep their barrel of washing water covered up. A piece of old sacking——"

"Go away, you little red-headed sinner!" is the regrettable and irreverent reply. "And try and remember there's a war on."

Ten minutes later Dimsdale picked up a pipe which was lying on the table. "This must be the Doc.'s," he said resignedly, and handed it to the runner who was going down to Headquarters with the daily strength return.

At six o'clock comes the best meal of the day, at any rate for those whose labours are ended. In "D" Company we believe in keeping up appearances, for which reason we start off with a soup and finish up with a savoury. It is cool, the flies have disappeared after the mysterious habit of the Palestine fly at dusk, and every one has a fairly good appetite. The conversation does not sparkle, because conditions on Mount Ephraim do not encourage a continuous flow of wit. The principal topic is the Wadi Post, a duty which is undertaken nightly by a platoon from "D" Company. Between Tin Hat and Berukin runs a narrow wadi, the whole of which is visible in the daytime. In order that stray Turks

may not wander along it into our lines under cover of darkness it was found necessary to block it at night with a post, and to cover the post with a few booby traps in the shape of bombs attached to wires. There was, it goes without saying, no competition among the officers for the honour of sleeping in the wadi. It was very uncomfortable, and while we were there no Turk attempted to pass through.

To-night the lot has fallen on the Mess President, who has never been down before, and his brother officers are making a valiant effort to spoil his dinner by expatiating on the horrors which lie in front of him.

"You'd better take a blanket," said the Pessimist. "Not that you are likely to get much sleep, of course, but it's beastly cold down there."

"And mind you're jolly careful about those bombs," says Dimsdale. Of course you'll have to go out and have a look at them, and in the dark it's not too easy to see the wires. And if you did bump into them——"

"Don't forget to tell him about the fourth bomb," put in Beaver. "You know, the one we never found."

"Oh, yes, there's a fourth bomb out as well, but we haven't been able to strike it," continued Dimsdale. "The fellow who laid it went down the line sick."

"It seems to me damn silly," said the Mess President indignantly. "What do they want to go

chucking live bombs about in front of the post for? Much more likely to kill us than to kill a Turk."

"Well, if there's an accident we shall hear the explosion all right," remarked Beaver cheerfully. "And it won't take us long to send a stretcher down."

"You'd better be careful," said the Captain. "I'm sleeping on that stretcher."

"Anyhow, Rodwell has got to come down and show me exactly where those beastly bombs are," insisted the Mess President.

"Mind he doesn't land you with the post, Rodwell, and come home comfortably to bed. He's an artful old cuss."

The sun had slipped behind Toogood and the shadows were stealing up the wadis, swallowing them up one by one in darkness.

The Mess President rose to his feet and bade the Mess a resentful good night. The Captain also went out to give the signal to "Stand to." The darkness swept over the hills, and from the west came a clatter of rifle and machine-gun fire.

"That'll be the Gurks, sir," said Nelcher, the Lewis-gun Sergeant. "Always fire like that every night at the lime kiln on Mogg Ridge."

An hour later the Captain went down the hill to visit the Wadi Post and the Mess President. When he got to the bottom he turned sharply to the left and followed a rough track up the wadi.

By now it was quite dark and the path was hard to distinguish ; it was necessary to go slowly in order to avoid tripping over the big stones which lay in the way.

Presently a low call from a little way up the hill showed the presence of the piquet, and in another minute he had found the Mess President, established in a small circular sangar.

" All well ? "

" Yes."

" Spotted all the bombs ? "

" All except the fourth one, and we know that it's somewhere up on this side."

The Captain glanced round at the arrangements.

" Well, I'll be getting back," he said.

" What's that ? "

From up the wadi came a strange sound, the voice of a man singing.

In the stillness of the night they could hear every note of the song, a wild plaintive tune, as are most of the songs of the East. Up and down it went, a little monotonous, but full of rude music. There was something eerie in this voice coming out of No Man's Land in the night.

" It's the old priest again," explained the Captain. " He often comes and sings sacred songs close to our lines, in the hope that the Indian Mohammedans may hear them. The Sikhs went out several times and tried to catch him, but he's too wily. Probably a Pathan deserter.

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He turned and walked slowly back down the wadi.

The voice of the singer fell more and more faintly on his ears, dying away at last in the stillness of the night.

## VII

### The Mixed Crusade

**I**T has been suggested that to that collect in which we include in our petitions a prayer for Jews, Turks, Infidels and Hereticks, the name of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force should be added. Certainly, since the building of the Tower of Babel, so large a variety of races, languages and religions have never been gathered together for a common purpose.

Least conspicuous and most hard-worked is, of course, that ubiquitous personage, the British soldier. If newspaper notoriety corresponded in an exact ratio with work done, we should hear a lot more about him than we do. He is, unfortunately, a less picturesque subject than some of his fellows in harness.

There are, for instance, the Indians. There is scarcely one of what used to be known as the warlike races which is unrepresented. There are Pathans, Punjabi Mussulmans, Sikhs, Dogras, Jats, Gurkhas, Mahrattas, Rajputs, Brahmans. Moreover many of the other races of India from which during the last fifty years we have drawn no recruits have come into

this war. There are even two Burmese battalions, looking comically like Gurkhas, and among the Ambulances there is a very fair smattering of Bengalis.

Outside of India we have the other Imperial troops. There are Australians and New Zealanders, mounted on horses or camels, and domiciled somewhere in the neighbourhood of the Jordan Valley. There are a lot of South Africans, mostly gunners, and happy is the Division which has a brigade of them at its back.

There are Cape boys, Sudanese and Egyptian Regulars, and West Indians.

And the contribution from the British Empire by no means exhausts the list. There are a lot of Frenchmen, both *poilus* and Colonials. There is a small band of Italians, mostly to be met with at Port Said, where they dazzle the inhabitants with their resplendent uniforms, and quarrel intermittently with the Australian depot.

There is, or more generally there is not, the army of irregulars led by the Emir Feisul, and operating somewhere across the Jordan. One day they will be greatly in evidence, raiding the railway to Medina and making holes in the Turkish communications. A few days later they will have disappeared as completely as if the earth had swallowed them up. They will be back in the remotest parts of Arabia, looking after their crops and herds, or harrying their neighbours, or indulging in the other peacetime pursuits of the Arab.

There are the famous "Jordan Highlanders," "camouflaged" as Royal Fusiliers and dressed in khaki; the old charge against the Zionists was that they were wealthy Jews who were in favour of emigration to Palestine—for other Jews. But the 38th and 39th Royal Fusiliers are practical Zionists who are prepared not only to settle in Palestine but to fight for it. Their military value has not, it is true, been very seriously tested as yet, but they have created the greatest enthusiasm among their compatriots in Jerusalem and Cairo.

Then there are Armenians and Syrians, mysterious units tucked away in odd corners of the line, but very much in evidence in the dispatches.

There is a regiment of Cavalry called the *Nixte Cavallerie*, about whose nationality no one seems to know anything. By all accounts they are dressed in flowing robes and ride on grey ponies and are frequently mistaken for the enemy.

There is another strange battalion of doubtful origin, the men in which wear wooden hats shaped like electric-light shades. They are suspected of hailing from the purlieus of Cochin China and are to be met with on Lines of Communication.

Last, but by no means least, come two very tried friends, the Camel Transport Corps and the Egyptian Labour Corps.

The former claim a distinct social superiority over the latter. They are almost soldiers, come right close up to the front line, and wear an æsthetic blue

garment with the lettering of their corps sewn on it in red. Also they are in charge of our very good comrade, the camel. To no man or beast should a greater measure of sympathy be extended than to the camel and his driver. Imagine the biggest incongruities possible—a Duchess turning somersaults in public, George Robey addressing a Diocesan Conference, Lord Curzon playing marbles in the street, or Charlie Chaplin making a speech in the House of Lords—then you will get some idea of the Camel Transport Corps on Mount Ephraim in the winter and spring of 1918.

When we picture the camel we picture a stately creature, full of self-possession and self-conceit, pacing its dignified way across a limitless desert in the blaze of an Eastern sun. But it was a very different sort of camel which we got to know on Mount Ephraim.

He was as a rule loaded up to the proverbial last straw with those extra blankets and bivouac sheets which no official returns ever show, or with enough rations to feed a company for two days. Behind him there generally ran a Quartermaster-Sergeant or a cook with a few more indispensable odds and ends which had been overlooked or turned out of a limber, and which he proceeded to hang on to the load as a man hangs his hat on a peg. So equipped the unfortunate animal would clamber some twelve or fifteen miles across what was usually either a precipice or a swamp. If he was in luck he would strike a mule

track, about as efficient a thoroughfare for him as a tight rope would be for a man ; if he was not in luck he would plunge about like a ship out of control, sometimes falling into a deep pool of water, sometimes careering sideways down a rocky slope, always slithering and sliding in the hopeless, heart-breaking mud. Beside him would trudge his miserable keeper, his flimsy blue uniform sodden with rain, the wind cutting into his bones, his body dropping with fatigue.

In the early days even the troops were on half-rations, and generally half-rations for a camel are rather less than nothing, and about the same for his master.

Yet they always stuck it out to the end. Sometimes the end came suddenly and rather horribly. An exceptionally slippery piece of road would be reached, the camel's tired, ungainly legs would sprawl helplessly outwards—and when that happens to a camel he dies a painful and unpleasant death.

Or else a limit would come to the endurance of man and beast. Then with courageous fatalism they would lie down by the roadside and die, the camel snarling discontentedly to the end, the man too broken even to snarl.

It was wonderful what they accomplished. Day after day and night after night, under the appalling climatic conditions of a Palestine winter, passing over places which by all the rules were impassable, they struggled through the mud and over the rocks,

bringing the rations and the water to the troops, who without them would have been undone.

When the story of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force is finally written, their share in its hardships and its triumphs must not be forgotten.

The Egyptian Labour Corps, on the other hand, is a very ancient formation. Their great grandfathers, many times removed, were the builders of the Pyramids, and since those days generation after generation have worked for a series of masters. Egyptian and Roman, Arab and Turk have all in turn despised and ill-treated them, the fellaheen of the Delta, but have never failed to make full use of their services. It is, therefore, very fitting that this most venerable corps should take the field again with the E.E.F. At any rate they may be seen on any day, in almost any place in Palestine, making roads, laying railway tracks, shifting dumps, and performing a score of other humble but necessary jobs. They work in gangs, under the supervision of a formidable foreman, clad in flowing white robes and armed with a cat-o'-nine-tails. From time to time a dispute may arise between two of the men, or some fellow may take a little rest from his labours.

Up will come the foreman and down will come the cat-o'-nine-tails, and "business as usual" will be very quickly resumed. Shades of the Chinese Slavery orators of 1906! But the work is done, which is the main consideration in the E.E.F., and the "Gippy" prefers it thus. He is a cheerful

fellow, who has his moments of depression when he remembers wistfully his mud hut and his melon patch in the Delta. But if rations are regular and the longed-for furlough is reasonably close at hand he is quite happy.

The Egyptian Labour Corps will ever evoke in those who have served in Egypt and Palestine the memory of a certain most unmusical melody.

It consists of a monotonous chant in which the words, which sound like "Karmeena, Karmlo," are repeated over and over again. The entire party clap their hands in unison, and judging by the intense pleasure which they all seem to experience, no two words have ever conveyed so subtle or so various a meaning.

The "Gippy" is also wonderfully imperturbable under trying circumstances. At Gaza I saw a gang working on the light railway just behind the trenches. Apparently the Turk saw them too, or guessed at their presence, for he started shelling. Shells began to fall all round them and one or two dropped among them. The ordinary man would have betaken himself for a space to a healthier neighbourhood, or would at least have flattened himself on the ground. But the "Gippy" Labour Corps did neither. They just carried on.

The British soldier has quite a warm corner in his heart for them, not far from that very warm corner which is reserved for Gurkhas.

A certain Colonel of Artillery was once walking

down the road when he passed a construction gang. A gentleman attired in something like an officer's uniform was at the moment engaged in beating with rather unnecessary violence one of the workmen.

The Colonel strode up to him and demanded who he was.

"I am a British officer," replied the gentleman with dignity. "I hold a commission as an officer in the Egyptian Labour Corps."

"British officer!" snorted the Colonel incredulously. "What the devil are you beating that man for like that?"

"I am preserving discipline," replied the other, "and I ask you to refrain from using strong language to me."

"You're not British," shouted the Colonel, now thoroughly roused.

"I am a Greek," replied the other with pride.

"A Greek!" shrieked the angry Colonel. "A Greek!" (It was at the time of Tino's delinquencies.) "A member of the most miserable race in the world! How dare you touch an honest Egyptian workman! How dare you, sir!"

The Colonel looked so very like violence that the Greek's courage failed him. Commission and all he scurried away out of reach, leaving his adversary in possession. For some minutes afterwards the neighbourhood resounded with angry cries of "A Greek! A Greek!"

Posterity, like the Colonel, will probably do more

than justice to the Egyptian Labour Corps. When our little achievements and little victories are forgotten the railway will still run from Kantara to Haifa and convoys will still pass along the great road into Palestine and the north. History, in fact, will repeat itself. The military exploits of the Pharaohs are buried in an oblivion broken by none save a few archæologists, but every year thousands of visitors come out to see the Pyramids or to pay sentimental moonlight trips to the Sphinx.

The "Gippy" is a feckless fellow, but he has quite a knack of building monuments more durable than bronze.

## VIII

### “The Fly be on the Turmut ”

“ When I was down on yonder farm, they sends for I a-mowin’ ;

I answers back, I’d sooner get the sack than give up turmut hoein’.

So all you jolly varmer boys that bides at home so warm, I now concludes my ditty with a-wishin’ you no harm.

For the Fly, the Fly, the Fly be on the Turmut :  
It’s all my eye for I to try to keep Fly off the Turmut.”

POSSIBLY with a view to discouraging people from engaging frivolously in the pastime of war, Providence has decreed that on active service you must not become too comfortable. Should you persist in importing luxuries into your surroundings action of a stern and uncompromising kind will be taken, and sooner or later you will find that your luggage will consist of a pack on your shoulders and a problematic blanket in the second line transport. And that, it may be pointed out, does not spell comfort.

In the late summer of 1918 we had begun to

surround ourselves with all sorts of insidious luxuries, most of which added infinitesimally to our comfort, but involved, whenever we made a move, at least two journeys for the regimental transport.

For the men luxury appeared in the form of a plethora of canteen stores and a vast accumulation of "bivvy" sheets.

For the officers it assumed many guises. Camp-chairs materialized from nowhere, bivouac tents of unorthodox size and weight arrived with officers returning from leave, and even that last and most inexcusable of comforts, the camp-bed, might be seen protruding from more than one officer's home.

As the Company Pessimist sadly remarked, "It is all much too good to last." And so it proved to be.

"D" Company is encamped on the lower slopes of Tin Hat Hill, so-called from the peculiarities of its shape. The morning's work, such as it was, is over, and a small group of officers are sitting round the green oilcloth, engaged in various occupations.

The Mess President, aided by his long-suffering batman, is making himself a camp stool; Starkey, a new-comer, is writing letters in the Company Commander's A.B. 153, which he has filched for the purpose; the Pessimist is acidly criticizing the Staff, and Dimsdale is listening to him and killing flies with a large black whisk.

The Company Commander had gone to Headquarters in response to an urgent message.

"What we want," the Pessimist is saying, "is a French staff."

"Bang! bang!" from the fly-whisk, and "Got him!" from Dimsdale. "That makes the twenty-seventh."

"Look out, you silly ass," interrupts the Mess President; "you're upsetting the whole table."

"Well, if you'd only take the trouble to get some of the Doc.'s fly-killer, I wouldn't have to bother about doing this," answers Dimsdale.

"I wish to goodness you wouldn't make such a beastly noise," from Starkey. "Call this a Mess? It's more like a bear-garden."

"What do they care?" inquired the Pessimist darkly. "What are our lives to them? Cannon fodder!"

At that moment the Company Commander appeared, obviously pregnant with important news. After turning Starkey out of his camp-chair and retrieving his A.B. 153, he turned to his audience.

"Well, what's the news? Another impending massacre, I suppose."

"Oh, shut up; let's hear it."

"It is," said the Company Commander with becoming gravity, "General Allenby's Autumn Meeting."

"In that case I'm going sick," remarked the Pessimist with decision and with the latitude that is permitted to the wearer of a Military Cross.

"Oh, no, you're not!" rejoined the Captain.

"You're going in the forefront of the battle. But mind, all of you, it's a tremendous secret. I've got to put under arrest any officer whom I hear talking about it, and the Colonel says that G.H.Q. are just longing to shoot some one in order to encourage the others."

"Well, let's hear the worst," said Starkey gloomily.

"We move the day after to-morrow," replied the Captain, "and you can bid a tearful farewell to the Wadi Ballut. And that's just about all I can tell you at present."

One move was very like another, especially to the veterans of Mount Ephraim, and two days' marching brought the Regiment, collected together for the first time for many weeks, to a stony piece of ground at the edge of the plain.

It was a time of reunion. In the hills companies lived apart, almost self-contained except for necessary communication with Headquarters. But at the camp of Deir Tarif we were a regiment again. In the afternoon there was football, company against company, or officers against sergeants; the band, hastily reformed, played the old familiar tunes again, and in the evening the officers met in a big rough shelter styled sarcastically the "Cap d'Or," after a celebrated Alexandria bar. There vast quantities of vermouth were quaffed and acquaintances made or renewed.

In the mornings there were route marches, which to some of us called up memories of days long past

in India. As the long column swung back into camp the Colonel would step aside to take the salute and the band would break into the regimental march.

"The Fly, the Fly, the Fly be on the Turmut :  
It's all my eye for I to try to keep Fly off the Turmut."

Just for a moment we would see our old camp at Kingsway, white under an Indian sun, the belt of dusty road which ran by it, the big Mess fronted by palms, and the lines of tents with their pleasant glimpses of brick floors and comfortable beds.

But, as we had been warned, a period of hard and special training lay before us. Route marches were stopped, and day by day we went out with tapes and strings and little flags, practising always the same thing, first by companies, then as a battalion, and finally as a brigade.

Sometimes the scheme would go well, and at other times—but when was there a successful play without a few unsuccessful rehearsals?

Let us attend one of these latter.

The battalion leaves the camp at about eight o'clock on a dark and moonless night. The intention is that it should march out about four miles and then, turning about, attack according to the time-honoured plan. The Colonel is in charge, and the Second-in-Command, accompanied by a staff armed with Vérey pistols, is to represent alternately the Turkish trenches and our own barrage. Somewhere in the

darkness is prowling the Brigadier, seeking whom he may devour.

We began inauspiciously by losing the Little Colonel, who cantered off to superintend matters at the Position of Assembly. This was only discovered after the Regiment had been marching determinedly for nearly a mile under the unconscious guidance of the leading platoon. There was a hurried conference of Company Commanders, who had the haziest ideas as to the exact programme which lay before them ; various people went off to look for the Little Colonel and vanished for ever into the night ; and finally the Lewis-gun mules, laden with *fanatis* of water, were discovered, quite fortuitously, waiting patiently at a spot which the officer in charge declared a little doubtfully to be the Position of Assembly. Certainty in a matter of that sort is a little hard to come by when the area of operations is several miles of bare, flat plain.

Eventually the Colonel was retrieved and a feverish ten minutes were spent in disentangling the Companies and getting them into the required order for the attack.

At zero hour we moved forward in what we hoped was the right direction.

By this time the British private was beginning to lose interest in the affair. He strolled along, thinking wistfully of his "bivvy" some four miles away, mildly responsive to the heated injunctions of his platoon commander when he showed signs of

straying in the wrong direction. In front danced the Little Colonel, compass in hand, from time to time lifting up his voice in wailing and lamentation over the shortcomings of a peccant Company Commander.

So we went on—and went on.

Surely we must have nearly reached the appointed Turkish line where we should encounter the massed Vérey lights of the Second-in-Command.

But we went on—and on.

Finally, when hope had almost left us, the long lines were halted. There was a hurried meeting of Company Commanders. The Captain returned slowly to his weary cohort.

"Lost again," he murmured sadly, and then out loud: "Fall in, 'D' Company." There was a sigh of relief, followed by comments which are unfortunately unprintable.

It was then realized, not without satisfaction, that if we had lost ourselves, we had also very successfully lost the Brigadier.

About a mile to the right a small party of natives were returning peacefully home from the day's work. Suddenly to their front a series of little explosions throbbed in the air and the sky was lit by the blazing trail of Vérey lights. Simultaneously they found themselves entangled in several furlongs of white tape.

Slightly aggrieved at what they could only regard as a practical joke on the part of that organization

of lunatics, the British Army of Invasion, they extricated themselves from the tape and proceeded with dignity on their way.

From afar off we watched the display of fireworks in the heavens, and then we too, slightly aggrieved, turned and went upon our way.

As the days passed gobbets of information were doled out under vows of secrecy to those concerned, and by September the 10th most people knew that a grand attack was impending, that troops were being concentrated for that purpose, and that the show was to take place on the broad belt of land between Mount Ephraim and the sea.

"No—rocks this time, anyhow," murmured one or two of the old hands, with grim recollections of April the 10th.

To those who kept their eyes open further information was forthcoming. Visits to Ludd betrayed the presence of many strange units, mostly mounted, lurking among the olive groves; and night after night light sleepers were awakened by the shuffling of countless feet along the dusty road, and looking out of their bivouacs into the darkness saw long columns of men, marching silently, their faces set towards the sea. It was rumoured, with due precautions, that all sorts of units which had not come our way since Gaza were foregathering for General Allenby's Autumn Meeting.

September 13 saw us plunged in a whirl of work. Conference after conference of Company Commanders

met in the Little Colonel's tent, each bringing its sequel of subsequent meetings with Platoon Commanders. Maps were issued with a prodigal hand, barrage tables were written out, surplus kit was sent to a dump at Wilhelma, and attenuated valises were sadly weighed at the Quartermaster's store.

Everything was known but the date and the time.

On the night of the 16th we struck our camp at Deir Tarif, leaving nothing but a few smoking heaps to mark the spot which had been our home for three weeks.

We had a night march of some ten miles to cover before we reached our destination, Mulebbis, famous for its Jewish colony and its vast orange orchards.

The dust hung over the road like a fog, and through it other battalions, batteries, supply trains, waiting by the roadside, appeared for one moment like wraiths and then disappeared into the dust-laden darkness. Horse, foot and artillery were all moving westward for the Autumn Meeting.

We reached Mulebbis in the small hours of the morning, our eyes, noses, ears and mouths filled with generous helpings of the soil of Palestine. There we spent the remains of the night and the whole of the next day, concealed in a large orange grove, safe from the prying eyes of Turkish aeroplanes. To right and left of us were other troops, also hiding and waiting.

To the casual observer Mulebbis by daytime must

have appeared an almost deserted town, but had he looked a little closer he would have seen that it was swarming like an ant-heap. Had he visited it at night he would have found it a babel of many languages—English, French, Arabic, Hindustani—the roads choked with transport and overflowing with marching troops. But at the first rays of dawn confusion vanished and the inhabitants, like the fairies in some child's story-book, were spirited away from sight until darkness should come again.

It was all part of General Allenby's " camouflage," which included, if report is to be believed, a dummy G.H.Q. at Jerusalem, dummy staff officers wearing dummy medals and dummy badges and sitting in dummy offices ; also brigade marches with transport complete, amid clouds of dust, eastward by day and back west by night.

The whole business was intended to convince the Turk that the real attack which he knew was impending would be directed against Es Salt and the Hedjaz railway, east of the Jordan.

Meanwhile the tide flowed westward, a steady trickle swelling the volume of the great wave, pent up and dammed at Mulebbis, Sarona and Ludd, which was waiting to burst upon and sweep away the Turkish defences on the Plain of Sharon.

To us, of course, all this was not yet revealed. We knew our own small part and very little else. We knew, in fact, that within the next week we were to attack at dawn and that our right was to follow

the Hadra Road, a sandy lane which ran through our trenches northward until it reached the village of Tireh, some five miles behind the Turkish front line. Tireh taken, the right of a great gap would have been secured, and through that gap would pour brigade after brigade of Yeomen and Indian Cavalry, riding like smoke to the north to make good the passes of Mount Carmel and the Plain of Esdraelon.

It was an ambitious plan, worthy of the man who had led us from Gaza to Jerusalem the year before; this time we were playing for no less a stake than the Turkish Empire.

Success depended almost entirely on concealment. Let the Turk discover how thinly held was our line from the Plain of Sharon to the Jordan and the whole venture would be imperilled. But they did not discover it, and for that let full credit be given to that much-abused individual, the British Staff Officer.

We did not stay long among the unripe oranges of Mulebbis. On the night of the 17th of September we moved on again, crossed the little river Auja and established ourselves among the low and sandy hills which begin some seven miles from the sea and end in the dunes of the shore.

Here we were told that the next night was the night of the attack.

All through that day we lay behind Cockshy Hill, sleeping as much as the flies permitted and fortunately able to draw on an unlimited supply of water. One or two of our aeroplanes circled lazily overhead,

watching like hawks the distant Turkish line for the appearance of those small dots in the sky which would mean an attempt at the eleventh hour to pierce the veil of secrecy.

Let us return to "D" Company. The men sprawl in little groups smoking and discussing the chances of the coming action. The Captain has retired to a small wadi near by with a book. Rodwell and Dimsdale are attempting to boil some eggs, bought in Mulebbis, over a Tommy's cooker, and Beaver is lying on his back, with his mouth wide open, emitting the gentle and regular sounds of one who sleeps the sleep of the untroubled. The other officers and about twenty N.C.O.'s and men have been left behind at Mulebbis. They will not reappear until the action is over, when they will be expected to do most of the hard work.

Towards evening matters become a little brisker. The Captain returns from his wadi and attends a last pow-wow with the Colonel. The Platoon Commanders gather their flocks about them and for the hundredth time rehearse the order of events. As soon as it is dark the battalion is to move to the Position of Assembly, a few hundred yards behind the front line. Exactly an hour before zero the companies will move independently towards their gaps in the wire. After that it is merely a matter of carrying out the programme.

The Captain goes the round of the platoons wishing the men good luck and being wished it in return, has

a final interview with the Company Quartermaster-Sergeant on the subject of water, and sits down as weary as if the battle was over instead of about to begin.

But at least everything was now ready, his share was done, and the issue lay on the knees of the gods.

At dark the Battalion fell in, the Padre first and then the Colonel spoke a few words to us, and we moved slowly up the road to the Position of Assembly.

There we had what seemed an interminable wait. The men lay down in the ranks and we all tried to get a little sleep. This, however, was made difficult owing to the constant coming and going of numberless people with questions to ask or information to impart. A running stream of whispered talk kept us alert ; officer after officer would hurry up, make his contribution and disappear like an actor from a stage.

It was all very restless and disconnected.

" I want the C.O. of the Westshires ! I want the C.O. of the Westshires ! "

" Damn ! "

" Where's Goddard ? I must see Goddard." Goddard was the adjutant.

Then a very polite voice : " Would you mind telling me the way to Brigade Headquarters ? What ? Over there ? Yes, but which light ? Oh, the red one. Thank you very much, I'm greatly obliged."

And out of the darkness: "'Ow the 'ell is a —— to get any sleep if you —— keep making such a —— row?"

"But when is zero hour? They haven't told us yet, you know."

The voice of the Colonel: "We know unofficially it's four thirty, but I've sent Goddard to Brigade to get it in black and white. He won't be a minute now."

Arrival of Goddard and general synchronization of watches by the light of a concealed electric torch.

"Good God! It's only eleven o'clock."

A tearful voice from the outer darkness betrays the presence of the O.C. Trench Mortar Battery.

"Can any one lend me a horse? I say, can any one lend me a horse? I can't find my ammunition."

He receives assistance, but very little sympathy. Trench mortars never do.

So it went on.

From the Turkish trenches about a mile away Vérey lights shot upwards in greater numbers than usual, leading us to wonder whether suspicion had been aroused. Regularly every ten minutes the silence of the night was shattered by a single Turkish gun. We saw the flash and heard the report, then the lonely scream of the shell, and finally the explosion about half a mile away. Just that one gun was firing—one shell always at the same interval of time. It sounded like the minute gun of a ship in distress. Unconsciously it was,

There was the occasional double rap of a sniper's rifle, and overhead we heard the swish of spent bullets.

So the night wore on. High in the heavens the great crescent of the moon shone down, turning the sullen surface of the ground to a delicate silver-grey. Westward and downward it slipped, and we knew that when it dipped behind the dark edge of the sandhills our hour would have come.

At two o'clock we emptied the *fanatis* and had one last, long drink. Water-bottles, as we knew, must at all costs be kept inviolate.

At a quarter past three there is a stir, a whisper of commands, and the dull shuffling of equipment being hoisted into its place.

We were off at last !

It was a slow, silent march, each Company Commander leading his Company to their gaps in the wire. These are clearly marked and numbered by great notice boards, erected a few hours previously.

"W 5, that's your gap," whispered the Captain to Beaver, who was commanding 13 Platoon.

"And the next gap is fifty yards to the left, just hidden by that little rise."

The platoons broke away and moved, four little black knots of men, to their appointed stations. The lower horn of the moon now stood balanced on the line of dunes and the blackness of night was already creeping up the shallow valleys, covering the ground as with a great cloth, and spreading swiftly

up the slopes that still glittered in the moonlight.

We lay down and waited.

Then as though a black thundercloud had passed before the moon the hills were suddenly blotted out and we peered blindly through the darkness.

Then we got up and passed silently through our gaps in the wire to take up our alignment on a broad white tape stretched along the ground some fifty yards in front of the wire.

Behind us came out supports, file upon file of tall Punjabis, and immediately to our left we could just see the little Ghurkas busily sorting themselves out.

There were a few minutes of rapid organization and we lay down again to wait until Zero hour.

We lay there less than half an hour, but to us it was more than half eternity.

Suddenly the Turkish minute gun spoke out, as it seemed from near by, and sent our hearts leaping and thumping. Vérey lights soared and curled a few hundred yards away, and in their pale, relentless glare it seemed as if we must be visible.

The Captain looked at his watch.

"Fifteen minutes past four."

At twenty-five past they were to move forward, and at half-past four the barrage was due to start.

Surely those Ghurkas were encroaching on to our line! And why could not those infernal Punjabis keep quiet?

"Chuprao! Chuprao!" he whispered back fiercely to them.

He looked again at his watch.

Sixteen minutes past! God! It must have stopped. Perhaps—but the watch on his other wrist told the same tale.

Every minute seemed to be drawn out like a piece of fine elastic.

Suppose that the Turks knew that they were there, and were waiting—waiting—till a few minutes before zero when all the assaulting troops would be in position. And then—with a hurricane of shell and machine-gun fire turn the ground in front of the wire into a bloody shambles, and the attacking lines into a mass of trapped and stricken animals.

He cursed his imagination and thought resolutely of other things.

And the minutes dragged slowly on.

So he lay there, his eyes glued to the dial of his watch.

Suddenly he sprang up with a wave of his hand and went forward. Without a word a long line of men behind him rose up and followed; there was a pause and then another and another and yet other lines, each in turn, went forward.

The deep silence of the night was unbroken save for the faint crackling of dry stalks, as though a gust of sea wind was stirring them. As if conscious that something was happening the enemy sent up light after light, now strangely near.

But still the silence was unbroken, though hearts were thumping like sledge-hammers. Right and left and behind, like an army of phantoms, the lines moved forward through a silence that weighed on us like lead.

Twenty-seven, twenty-eight, twenty-nine minutes past——

"God! we must be right on their trenches."

Suddenly, clear as a bugle, a machine gun spoke four times behind us: four swift notes cutting into the silence like a sharp knife.

And then the storm broke—with a wild screaming of shells, breaking, shattering, crashing, until it seemed as if all the powers of hell were loose.

With that breaking of the storm the oppression lifted from the lines. That sinister silence had passed; we knew now that we had just to go on and on!

Men leapt forward, orders were shouted, unheard amid the tumult of the guns. The Turkish position, now so close, was ringed with flame and smoke.

Then the lines stopped and for one interminable moment we knelt and watched the inferno raging less than a hundred yards away.

There was a barely noticeable lull, and the volume of sound seemed slightly less. The barrage had lifted, and with hoarse cries the lines sprang forward into the smoke, ripping at the wire and tumbling

headlong into deep trenches. The first Turkish position had been carried.

Down the trenches scurried a little handful of men with brown faces and dirty uniforms, holding up their hands and crying, "Teleem!" (prisoner).

In the east the pale light of dawn was breaking over Mount Ephraim, and the air, heavy with smoke and dust, and reeking with the fumes of the shells, was penetrated by the faint glow of the coming day.

As the barrage drew away, the clouds, driven by little gusts of wind, would lift, and for a moment it was possible to see the ground near by. Then a swirl of black and yellow mist would drop over you, closing about you like a wall, cutting off your vision. Sudden glimpses would appear like slides of a magic-lantern. At one moment the Captain saw a few yards away a Turk, sitting upon the ground trying to staunch a gaping wound in his stomach and crying piteously; the next he came face to face with the Commander of "C" Company, and each laughingly accused the other of loss of direction.

At one moment you found yourself close to the worn track of the Hadra Road; at the next you were swallowed up in a yelling crowd of Gurkhas and Punjabis.

So the long lines swayed and tossed, swinging half blindly now to one side and now to the other, but always going forward.

By the time the support trenches were reached

the day had dawned, and above the seething cauldron in front of us we could see the clear amber of the morning light.

In these parts the soil is covered with a coating of fine dust which in the rainy season turns to mud ; in September, however, all is dry and parched by the sun of the summer months, and the loose surface, churned and scattered by our shells, rose in a great bank and hung in the air as if tormented by a gigantic dust-storm.

So we went on, keeping always a little behind our barrage, which, lashing and pounding, seemed to be striving to beat out every vestige of life on the ground which lay before us.

Now we could see each others' faces, pale, dirty and unshaven. In front darted the Little Colonel with a Turkish bayonet in his hand, shouting angrily at a mob of yelling Punjabis who were bearing blindly across our track.

It did not seem like an attack at all. It was a procession, a picnic. We had casualties, but in the darkness we had not seen them. The men waved their yellow artillery flags and the long lines went on, shouting and laughing, following the great moving bank in front of them, much as the Children of Israel must have followed the Pillar of Smoke.

Everywhere were traces of the completeness of the surprise : ammunition dumps untouched, machine guns, trench mortars, stores of every kind, overturned and disordered.

We overran a line of cookers in which the breakfast coffee was still bubbling and boiling. Most of the cooks had fled and the survivors meekly surrendered to the whooping crowd which leapt on to them. Far behind us the belated Turkish barrage was falling on No Man's Land, for the dust and smoke which hid the enemy from us also hid us from them.

There were occasional pauses while the barrage halted to search more thoroughly a piece of ground. At one of these Sergeant Hankey ran up to the Commander of "D" Company.

"Mr. Dimsdale's hit, sir! I've taken command of 15 Platoon." This was the first casualty reported.

"Is he bad?"

"Don't know, sir; he seemed pretty well knocked out."

Yet it was all unreal, this riotous swoop through the enemy's country. Presently we would wake up and find that it was a nightmare, that the morning sun was shining on the rocks of Mount Ephraim and the batmen were arriving with the shaving water. And a little later on, over the tea and bacon, Dimsdale would be mildly chaffed.

Meanwhile we must go on and on until we woke up.

After we had advanced nearly three miles the barrage stopped. The guns had fired to the utmost limit of their range; now they must limber up and drive furiously forward to new positions from which they could continue to cover the advance of the infantry.

As the clouds in front of us grew thin and finally vanished we began to see the country around, bathed in the morning light.

To our left lay the village of Miskeh, a cluster of white houses and mud huts, invaded a few minutes later by a mixed band of Gurkhas and Westshires and cleared of nearly a hundred prisoners.

In front was a long low ridge running almost parallel with our friend the Hadra Road in the direction of our final objective, Tireh.

Of the village itself we could see nothing, as it was surrounded by cactus gardens, but towards it we pushed, keeping on to and close to the ridge.

As soon as our barrage stopped the Turk began to recover from his first surprise. At least he could see us now.

From our right flank, unprotected by any troops, came the crackling of machine guns, and here and there a man dropped.

In order to cover this exposed flank the Little Colonel detached one of the companies. Soon, we knew, armoured cars and cavalry would be streaming up the Hadra Road and would deal with the situation on the other side of it.

In the meantime the rest of us could but go forward.

Little bodies of retreating Turks were occasionally visible and our Lewis gunners would race forward and pump bullets into them. In the distance we could see a solitary cart driving away, apparently

unconcerned by the stream of bullets which followed it.

About four hundred yards from Tireh we came to the edge of the cactus gardens, where we found a deep but unoccupied trench. A halt became necessary. On our right flank Turkish machine guns were rattling fiercely; in front, Tireh was clearly held in strength; and on a hill to our left appeared a squadron or more of Turkish cavalry, who were at once engaged with considerable effect by our Lewis guns.

“The Colonel’s hit!”

The message came by a breathless runner. A few minutes later one of the Company Commanders was shot through the head and killed instantaneously, while another was wounded. Officers and men began to drop, and though the Turks on both flanks were driven back, the situation was becoming serious.

An advance of nearly five miles through the blinding dust had necessarily scattered the Regiment, and what was left was strung out in a thin line, hanging on to the edge of Tireh.

Thirteen Platoon, under cover of the cactus, made an attempt to enter the village, but found it full of Turks and Germans. We could only hang on and wait until our flanks were secured and the supports arrived.

Soon they began to come. Gunner officers galloped up to take stock of the situation, much-needed ammunition appeared, and on our left the

rattle of rifle fire showed that the Gurkhas were driving before them the swarm of Turkish cavalry which was worrying at our flank.

In front there was a lull in the firing, and on the order of the Brigadier (to whom the firing line ever offered a temptation not to be resisted) the battalion swept forward once more.

In a few minutes Tireh had been taken, and well before the scheduled time Divisional Headquarters heard that the right of the great gap had been made good.

We spent the remainder of that day in Tireh, getting what shade we could from the cactus hedges, foraging for water and eggs in the village, and compiling that grim sequel to an engagement, the casualty roll.

At first it was safer to lie down, as from our right came a dropping long-range fire, and the bullets tore their way without difficulty through the crumbling mud walls of the village.

But presently the gap began to fill with cavalry and armoured cars, speeding northward to carry out the second part of the scheme.

We, like the forwards in a game of Rugby football, had broken the enemy's scrum, and now the three-quarters were darting through to score the winning try.

In the afternoon peace dropped once more upon Tireh.

In the distance we could hear the booming of the

guns, but that was almost the only sign of war. The inhabitants began to emerge from their hiding-places and carry on their usual occupations, and in the glory of the autumn sun the village resumed its sleepy, peaceful life.

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